



# **WILTSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP**

## **DOMESTIC HOMICIDE REVIEW**

### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

**Report into the death of Ellie in May 2019**

**Report produced for Wiltshire Community Safety Partnership by Paula Harding, Associate of Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse**

**Final Version, June 2021**

**STANDING  
TOGETHER**  
against domestic abuse

### **Tribute to Ellie**

From a young age Ellie had a huge love for animals. Every spring we would visit Lackham during the lambing season and during the summer holidays make many visits to animal farms to hold chicks, rabbits, and feed baby animals.

On her first day at primary school she put holes in her brand new shoes as she spent every playtime playing with her friends crawling around on her hands and knees being a cat.

Ellie also loved our summer trips Devon to stay at our Aunt and Uncle's house, more so she loved their puppy Elsa and whilst the other young cousins were scared of the lively puppy jumping up, Ellie wasn't and had a wonderful way with animals, calming the lively puppy and making it do whatever she wanted.

Every year from a young age a pony always featured on her Christmas or Birthday wish list. We tried to get away with buying a hobby horse to run around the garden on. The pleas continued so we adopted an Exmoor Pony, however due to the distance we could only visit twice a year. We finally decided as we lived in beautiful rural Wiltshire to buy her a pony - Missy.

Missy was white with a long flowing mane and tail, she looked like a Unicorn when she was white although often, she looked brown as she loved rolling in mud. Ellie spent hours brushing her and plaiting her mane and tail. She loved showing her off at local shows in "prettiest pony classes" and was so proud one year to come first at Foxham show in the "best family pony class".

Ellie's natural riding ability improved immensely and in no time she was ready to move onto her next pony Blackjack. Again, winters and summers she competed in local shows and cross-country events. It was nail biting for us to watch as she would gallop past and fly over enormous cross-country jumps.

She also spent the summer months often just herself and her beloved Blackjack hacking over Wiltshire's beautiful countryside.

Ellie loved the Sixth form at school where she was studying for A levels. She had built up a close group of friends who would often meet up at weekends and do activities such as the "Escape Rooms". She would often ask if the group could meet at our house "it's just a gathering mum not a party".

We talked about visits to university open days and apprenticeships within the Police force – she wondered if she could get into the mounted police with her riding skills.

Whilst she was excited about the next step in her life she also said "but I don't want the Sixth Form to end as I love it so much"

Ellie had a lovely relationship with her older brother growing up, they rarely argued, she was fun, loving and a joy to be around.

As a family we live every moment of every day with the searing pain of her loss. She was such a delightful, kind, gentle, fun loving girl, a beautiful soul inside and out.

We live daily with the pain and sadness that we will never see her graduate from university, get married and become a mother herself. We will never have the chance to love and cherish our grandchildren, her children.

We will never be able to comprehend why or how anyone could harm such an exceptionally special person as our dear Ellie, in such a horrific way.

She will never be forgotten and will always be in our hearts.

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## Executive Summary

### 1. Introduction

- 1.1 This review concerns the death of a seventeen-year old girl who was killed by her ex-boyfriend straight after she had ended their three-month-long relationship. Both young people were studying for their mock 'A' level examinations when the murder took place, seemingly 'out of the blue'. Whilst no agencies were involved and no-one was aware that there were any concerns within the relationship, this domestic homicide review sought to establish broader learning concerning the prevention of domestic abuse in young people's relationships.
- 1.2 The victim's real name has been used in this report at the request of her family.
- 1.3 The perpetrator pleaded guilty to murder and he was sentenced, as a juvenile, to 12 years and 6 months imprisonment before parole could be considered. The judge considered that mitigating factors including the lack of pre-meditation, references to his good character and his remorse, contributed to some reduction in his sentence.

### 2. Summary of the Review Process

- 2.1 The decision to undertake a domestic homicide review was made by the Chair of Wiltshire Community Safety Partnership and the Home Office was notified of the decision in May 2019. An independent chair and review panel were appointed, and the review was managed in accordance with the relevant statutory guidance.
- 2.2 The review panel members are listed in Appendix A and included Splitz who added a specialist perspective on gendered violence and the broader 'victim perspective' to the review. A number of agencies brought specialist knowledge and experience of working with young people. The panel members were all independent of the particular case.

- 2.3 The process began with an initial meeting of the review panel in September 2019, after criminal proceedings were complete. Terms of reference were drawn up and incorporated key lines of enquiry as featured in Appendix B. Agencies participating in this review are featured in Appendix C as well as those agencies which had no contact.
- 2.4 The review panel met on three occasions and the Independent Chair met with Ellie's family members who contributed to the terms of reference. Their views, together with the views of their advocate, have contributed to the final report wherever possible. The Independent Chair also met with the perpetrator and his family.
- 2.5 The Overview Report was endorsed by Wiltshire Community Safety Partnership in November 2020 before being submitted to the Home Office Quality Assurance Group for approval.

## **2.1 Independent Chair and Author**

- 2.1.1 The Independent Chair and Author is Paula Harding, an Associate Chair with the charity, Standing Together Against Domestic Abuse. She has over twenty-five years' experience of working in domestic abuse with both senior local authority management and specialist domestic abuse sector experience. For more than ten of those years she was a local authority strategic and commissioning lead for domestic abuse and violence against women and has been an independent chair and author of domestic homicide and safeguarding adult reviews since 2016. She completed an M.A. (Birmingham) in Equalities and Social Policy in 1997, focusing on domestic abuse and social welfare, and is a regular contributor to conferences, national consultations and academic research. She completed the OCR certificated training funded by the Home Office for *Independent Chairs of Domestic Homicide Reviews* in 2013. She has also completed the on-line training provided by the Home Office, *Conducting a Homicide*

Review,<sup>1</sup> as well as undertaken accredited training on the Significant Incident Learning Process and Learning Disability Mortality Reviews.

### **3. Key Issues and Learning**

#### **3.1 Separation**

3.1.1 After Ellie had ended the short relationship, which had involved some seemingly minor behaviours of jealousy and possessiveness on the part of the perpetrator, it was alarming how quickly this separation escalated to murder. Evidence on domestic homicide<sup>2</sup> has shown that the escalation to homicide can be sudden and unexpected and practitioners therefore need to be able to respond pro- actively in protecting a victim when they are planning to separate or have recently separated. Family and friends also need to be aware that behaviours such as jealousy, possessiveness and isolation are indicators of domestic abuse

#### **3.2 Educational Sabotage**

- 3.2.1 Ellie sought a break from the perpetrator during their revision for mock 'A' level exams, but the perpetrator appeared not to accept this. His disruption of her studies thereafter should be seen within the context of educational sabotage.
- 3.2.2 Educational sabotage is a less known form of coercive control and economic abuse which disrupts a victim's ability to gain educational qualifications and furthers a perpetrator's power and control over them.

#### **3.3 Domestic abuse in adolescent intimate relationships**

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<sup>1</sup> Available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/conducting-a-domestic-homicide-review-online-learning>

<sup>2</sup> See the full report for details of research and evidence

3.3.1 Although domestic abuse was not known in this case, teenage relationship abuse<sup>3</sup> affects a great many young people. Abuse will often involve the use of social media and young people will generally have less experience of knowing what constitutes coercive and controlling behaviour within a relationship. Much activity has been undertaken both locally and nationally to raise awareness of abuse in young people's relationships in recent years.

### 3.4 **Providing services for young people experiencing abuse**

3.4.1 Had Ellie identified her relationship as abusive, or wanted to seek help, the review found that the range of local domestic abuse services would have been available to her and any other young person over the age of 16, including a young person's independent domestic violence advisor (IDVA). However, young people will often be unaware that the services are available or relevant to them. Research<sup>4</sup> has shown that teenage girls may be more likely to use digital resources than traditional helplines to seek information and support regarding their relationships.

### 3.5 **School-Based Prevention**

3.5.1 The review recognised that the secondary school attended by both Ellie and perpetrator, had provided a robust programme of relationship education throughout the young people's attendance there. This programme was largely consistent with the evidence base<sup>5</sup> on best practice of the delivery of school-based relationship education and abuse prevention programmes. At the time of writing, schools are preparing for the new and incoming statutory duty to provide relationships, sex and health education. Therefore, recognising and adhering to the existing evidence base for

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<sup>3</sup> There is currently no legal definition of abuse in young people's relationships, but it is commonly referred to by terms such as teenage relationship abuse, adolescent relationship abuse or domestic abuse.

<sup>4</sup> See the full report for details of research and evidence

<sup>5</sup> See the full report for details of research and evidence



promoting relationships based upon equality and respect has become all the more important.

## 4. Recommendations

**Recommendation 1:** That Wiltshire Community Safety Partnership further promotes with agencies, the indicators of domestic abuse in young people's relationships and promotes the sources of help and information available to family and friends

**Recommendation 2:** That Wiltshire Community Safety Partnership considers and responds to the evaluation of the pilot of the Young Person's Independent Domestic Violence Advisor being delivered by Splitz Support Service

**Recommendation 3:** That Wiltshire Community Safety Partnership should, through local commissioners and specialist services, promote access to specialist domestic abuse services and pathways for young people aged 16 and over.

**Recommendation 4:** That Wiltshire Community Safety Partnership considers how evidence-based best practice in whole school approaches to healthy relationships, can be shared and consolidated across Wiltshire schools.

## 5. Conclusions

- 5.1 This murder of a much-loved, intelligent, talented, vivacious, 17-year-old, teenage girl by her 17-year-old ex-boyfriend has devastated a community.
- 5.2 Whilst on face value, the murder appeared to have taken place 'out of the blue', there were some indicators of coercion and control disclosed to friends in the last week of Ellie's life. However, these were not of a scale at that time that would have warranted friend's seeking professional intervention. The fact that the murder took place when Ellie had recently ended the relationship, and included excessive violence and

brutality, makes it consistent with the pattern of a high proportion of murders of women. In doing so, it challenges, as others have done, the narrative of momentary loss of control. However, no agency or person was aware of domestic abuse and there were no indications that Ellie had been in any way fearful within the relationship.

- 5.3 In the absence of any agency involvement, the review considered the efforts that the secondary school in particular, and Wiltshire in general, had undertaken to prevent abuse in young people's relationships. Whilst this did not take the form of an evaluation, it was evident that both the school and the community safety partnership had made considerable strides towards prevention through the awareness of abuse and the promotion of equal, respectful and healthy relationships and much good practice was evident.
- 5.4 In this way, the review found no shortcomings in the local area's response to domestic abuse but has made recommendations for the Community Safety Partnership to consider: further raising awareness of indicators of abuse in young people's relationships for agencies as well as families and friends; the sustainability of the Young Person's Independent Domestic Violence Advisor role; promotion of the support available for young people, and teenage girls in particular; and the consolidation of evidence-based best practice responses within schools concerning the prevention of abuse within young people's relationships.
- 5.5 Whilst no shortcomings were identified in local service responses, it is important for all concerned, and for future victims of domestic abuse, that responses are nonetheless strengthened after such a traumatic loss and addressing these recommendations may provide the most positive response for young people at this time.

## **Achievements of the parents of Ellie Gould**

Unable to accept the lenient sentence given to Thomas Griffiths for the brutal murder of their beloved daughter Ellie, Carole and Matthew Gould launched a campaign for a sliding scale when sentencing youths. A new law is due to be passed known as “Ellie’s Law “which increases the sentencing for youths the closer they get to 18 years old. “Ellie’s Law “also stops offenders having their sentences reviewed once they turn 18.

Carole Gould has also joined forces with another bereaved mother – Julie Devey who also lost her daughter to domestic homicide to campaign to close the 10 year disparity in sentencing between domestic murders and street murders with use of a knife.

The success of their campaigning has resulted in meetings with the Lord Chancellor Robert Buckland, Shadow Minister for Domestic Violence and Safeguarding Jess Phillips and Domestic Abuse Commissioner Nicole Jacobs and has forced a government review of sentencing for domestic homicides headed up by QC Barrister Clare Wade. Carole Gould and Julie Devey will be key stakeholders in this review.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/spotlight-on-domestic-homicides-as-independent-reviewer-appointed>

## **Update on Ellie’s friends achievements**

Ellie’s friends have become Directors of a Community Interest Company ACCESS SAFETY, they have secured funding and their ambition is to fill the hole in the National School Curriculum around the teaching of unhealthy and healthy relationships and self-protection techniques. The young women strongly believe that resources produced by them, based on their experiences will be relatable to young people and have more impact.

The young women are also keen to be the front faces of any National Campaign to help educate young people on how to access help if they find themselves in an unhealthy relationship and to date safely. They want young people to be taught about Splitz, Ask for ANI, Clare’s Law and the Hollie Guard personal safety app and this education to have a statutory footing in the National Curriculum.

We have had a meeting with Stephanie Brivio and her team from the Department of Education who are very keen to develop these ideas in compulsory and higher education as well as developing work with the following organisations :

Kandu arts

Streetwise 365

Venturers Academy – to pilot these ideas

A follow up meeting is scheduled for November 2021.

## **Appendix A: Review Panel Members**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Role/Organisation</b>
Paula Harding	Independent Chair
(Redacted)	Headteacher, (redacted) Secondary School
Andrea Brazier	Service Manager for Young People, Wiltshire Council
Dominic Taylor	Strategic Manager, Public Protection, Wiltshire Police
Donald Pocock	Community Inspector, Wiltshire Police
Emma Harrold	Domestic Abuse Reduction Co-ordinator, Wiltshire Council
Fiona Finlay	Designated Doctor, Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group and Chair of Wiltshire Safeguarding Children Board Practice Review Group
Fran Lewis	Executive Director, Splitz Support Service
Hayley Mortimer	Public Health Consultant, Wiltshire Council
Jackie Pennington	Lead IDVA, Splitz Support Service
James Dunne	NHS Wiltshire, Clinical Commissioning Group
Jayne Harrison	Trust Lead Nurse for Safeguarding Children, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
Jo Naylor	Named Nurse for Safeguarding Children, Virgin Care
Joanne Smith	Named Nurse Safeguarding Children, Great Western Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust
Kathryne Abbott	Designated Professional Safeguarding Adults, NHS Wiltshire CCG
Lisa Colombi	Young People's Team Leader, Wiltshire Council
Martin Davis	Head of Service for Children and Families, Wiltshire Council
Mike Menzies	Named Nurse Safeguarding Children, Royal United Hospital – Bath
Netty Snelling	Safeguarding Lead (Child), Wiltshire Health and Care
Sean Collins	Safeguarding Lead (Adults), Chippenham Community Hospital
Tracy Daszkiewicz	Director of Public Health, Wiltshire Council

## **Appendix B: Key Lines of Enquiry**

The review sought to address both the 'circumstances of particular concern' set out in the Multi-Agency Statutory Guidance for the Conduct of Domestic Homicide Reviews (2016) and the following specific issues identified in this particular case:

- a. Explore the victim's experience and whether there had been any indicators of domestic abuse in her relationship with the perpetrator
- b. If indicators existed, explore opportunities for agencies, and the informal networks to which either individual belonged, to identify and respond to domestic abuse
- c. Explore the context of the victim's life and any barriers to help-seeking if domestic abuse may have been a hidden feature of her relationship with reference to current research
- d. Consider the promotion of healthy relationships and access to specialist services undertaken within the school environment
- e. Consider the effectiveness of recent work undertaken in Wiltshire to prevent domestic abuse in young people's relationships; to promote the awareness of young people about domestic abuse and to provide relevant services to meet their needs.
- f. Develop recommendations from the findings of the review, taking into account national best practice in responding to domestic abuse in young people's relationships

## Appendix C: Agency Involvement in the Review

Individual reports were requested from the following organisations:

- (Redacted) Secondary School
- Wiltshire Public Health

The panel considered the routine healthcare that both the victim and perpetrator had received but these were not considered relevant to the review.

The following agencies were contacted but confirmed that the victim or perpetrator were either not known to them, or that their involvement was not relevant to this review:

- Avon and Wiltshire Mental Health Partnership
- Bristol, Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire Community Rehabilitation Company
- Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services
- Great Western Hospital
- MARAC
- Medvivo (GP Out of Hours Service)
- National Probation Service
- Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust
- Refuge Providers
- Royal United Hospital
- Salisbury Foundation Trust
- Splitz Support Service (specialist domestic abuse service)
- Virgin Care
- Wiltshire Council Adult Social Care, Children's Services and Housing Services
- Wiltshire Clinical Commissioning Group
- Wiltshire Health and Care
- Wiltshire Police
- Wiltshire Sexual Health Services
- Wiltshire Substance Misuse Service
- Wiltshire Youth Offending Service