

Seasons in the sun

It would not be proper to let September pass without mentioning the traditional new beginnings we often experience at this time of year that have probably remained a feature of our lives since we first started school. The summer's over (although another mini heatwave is being trailed by weather forecasters), schools are back and a new church year beckons. For Lincolnshire District it's an important one as key decisions are being taken about its future structure.

Safeguarding never really takes a break, but we have just published our refreshed strategy plan for the next couple of years. It was sent to Synod members and the DSG at the beginning of this month and will no doubt be posted on the website soon. The plan is not really a brand-new start, but it aims to provide fresh impetus to our work, recognising the changes that the establishment of the Connexional Safeguarding Team this time last year have made to how we operate.

One aspect of the plan is endeavouring to make sure that the District provides as much support as possible to local church safeguarding officers who form the backbone of our safeguarding community. Being a church safeguarding officer is an essential and rewarding role, but it can at times feel a bit isolated. So, through improved communication and targeted support from the circuit officers we are aiming to ensure that all members of the District safeguarding community I allude to, whether lay or ordained, feel confident and engaged in their roles.

Another September fresh start theme reminds us autumn is the traditional season of mists and mellow fruitfulness, as well as falling leaves, but it feels as if we are a bit ahead of schedule this year in some regards. However, seasons, weather and timings do have a bearing on safeguarding. Research suggests the following cycles in respect of children's safeguarding referrals:

- Hidden harm period of July and August – no school oversight, no free school meals, more unsupervised online access, few referrals.
- The school return effect – a spike in referrals as schools identify signs of abuse and receive disclosures.
- Winter festive period – cold weather, financial pressures, increase in domestic abuse referrals and reports of substance misuse.
- Post Christmas January spike – similar to what happens after summer holidays.
- Easter and Spring bank holidays – uptick in parental alcohol misuse, additional police referrals.

It goes without saying that the busiest days for children's referrals are Mondays, Tuesdays, and Fridays. I think we could have guessed that as it can be on a Sunday when a concern is first spotted at church and the Regional Officer for safeguarding is contacted the next day. Fridays can often be the day before an event when people want to check something out, just in case.

As part of our planning for the year, we will aim to remind the wider team of these 'spike' times and make sure we provide any necessary seasonal briefings well in advance.

For some of us though, me included, the September re-start is not always comfortable. It can be a new season of trepidation, angst and hopefully a bit of euphoria. But enough about Crystal Palace FC....

The important thing is to relish new beginnings and make full use of the renewed energy we hopefully feel after the holiday period.

Grahame Snelling
DSG Chair
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