Deafblind and neglected or deafblindness neglected? Revisiting the Beverley Lewis Case

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“Deafblindness is the great unseen and unrecognised disability”

(Michael Gerwat, Deafblind UK)
Who Are Deafblind People?

Laura Bridgman

Helen Keller

Alice Betteridge
Congenital Rubella Syndrome

Education and contact with welfare services

The Beverley Lewis Case (1966 – 1989)

Mother’s mental health difficulties

An untimely death
Revisiting the Case

• Review of newspaper articles, TV and radio

• Review of parliamentary debate (Hansard)

• Commentaries in journals

• Review of internal inquiries? NOT POSSIBLE!
The Inquiries and Media Response

Three Areas for Improvement
(Gloucestershire County Council and Health Authority Inquiry)

Perceived weaknesses in the law

Limited inter-agency communication
(Coroner)
Social Care and Deafblind People

1951
- Advisory Council for Welfare of Handicapped Persons
- REPORT ON THE SPECIAL WELFARE NEEDS OF DEAF-BLIND PERSONS

1988
- Deafblind Services Liaison Group
- BREAKING THROUGH: DEVELOPING SERVICES FOR DEAFBLIND PEOPLE

1989
- Social Services Inspectorate / Department of Health
- SIGNPOSTS: LEADING TO BETTER SERVICES FOR DEAFBLIND PEOPLE
Revisiting with a ‘deafblind lens’

The Vulnerability of Deafblind People

Specialist Assessment and Specialist Services

Multi-agency response and inter-professional communication
Policy Development

1997
Think Dual Sensory
(Department of Health)

2001
Social Care for Deafblind Children and Adults

2009
Social Care for Deafblind Children and Adults

Care Bill 2013
Contemporary Research

- Improved access to specialist assessment and services?
- Improved multi-agency response?
Implications for Practice

- Increased awareness of vulnerability
- Improved Access to Assessment and Services
- Improved communication and shared responsibility
A CHALLENGE FOR SOCIAL WORK HISTORIANS
In Gloucestershire, Beverley’s death has been recalled and rewritten as part of the history of local safeguarding policy.
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SENSE
Thank you for listening