

SAFEGUARDING SEMINAR.

A seminar and workshop on Safeguarding was held recently at Abergele Bowling Club. At the end of the day, everyone who attended felt they had learned something. The seminar was given by Paul Ashmore, BCGBA Safeguarding Officer, who has been in post for four years. As a former Social Worker dealing with vulnerable adults and children he is well qualified to lead such an event.

We started by looking at what it is to have a safe club and the role of a Safeguarding Officer.

The aim is to provide a welcoming and safe environment for players, both children and adults. Safeguarding is often confused with Child Protection. Safeguarding has a much broader portfolio with adult and child welfare encompassed within it.

The Safeguarding Officer is the first point of contact for members, parents and others in the event of a problem. They should be approachable, discreet and understanding and available. Good practice would be to appoint two officers, one female and one male. The reason for this is to provide support for one another. Problems may be gender sensitive and having two people should provide confidence to the complainant and the alleged instigator that the situation will be treated fairly and without bias. It would be a good idea to actually post a photo of the Safeguarding Officer/Officers in the clubhouse, so that all members and visitors know who to contact.

The seminar went on to look at what constitutes 'abuse'. We are all aware of the definition of verbal and physical abuse, but other abuses can be less obvious. An interesting one was neglect. Imagine someone withholding food from a child until they have performed to a preconceived standard of play or training – yes it does happen. We are not saying that we should take the place of trained social workers, and it would be folly to do so, but we should be aware of the needs of others and, at least have the mechanisms in place to record information and pass that on to professionals if necessary. At one time, clubs were very much like families. Everyone knew you from cradle to grave and it was easy to spot a change in someones behaviour. Today, members switch clubs frequently and someone with you this season may have moved on by the next, so it is harder to build a network to help each other.

The main thrust of the seminar was to raise awareness of the need for safeguarding. From 1st March 2019 ALL bowls clubs will need to have an officer or officers in place. This is a Government led initiative and the full information on safeguarding can be found on the BCGBA website, the WCGBA website and www.safeguardingbowls.org Get to know the steps you should take in the event of difficulties. Know who your Area Safeguarding Officer is and the Welsh Safeguarding Officer.

There is a fine line between interference and providing genuine support. Be aware and recognise unusual signs of behaviour in someone you know well. Do you know who to contact as next of kin in the event of sudden illness? A simple application form at the point of joining a club with these details could be of enormous help. Such forms would be confidential and only for the Safeguarding Officer/Officers.

So, the Safeguarding Officer is there to listen, reassure, record and report. They should not take on board all the responsibility personally. Be wary of making promises you can not keep or escalating a situation out of panic or misinformation. Check facts first.

Many people may think this does not apply to them, and that safeguarding is only for children. We all have feelings and anxieties or just plain 'bad days' and we need to recognise this in others too without over reacting. Talking about things over a cup of tea may be all you need to do. As members of the human race, we all need to give ourselves permission to care.

Jeanette Higham
WCGBA Press Officer.