

# PROTECTING CHILDREN ACROSS CULTURE AND FAITH

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VCF – The Victoria Climbié Foundation UK

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# OUR BACKGROUND

- **Victoria Climbié Family Campaign 2002**  
*Set up to call for public inquiry into her tragic death to ensure that Victoria did not die in vain, and that no other child should die in similar circumstances*
- **Victoria Climbié Public Inquiry led by Lord Laming 2003**  
*Delivered radical reforms to the UK child protection system; Every Child Matters, Children Act 2004, Working Together to Safeguard Children 2006 & 2010, Children's Commissioner, Local Safeguarding Children Boards*
- **VCF – The Victoria Climbié Foundation 2003**  
*Established by the parents of Victoria Climbié to continue campaigning for improvements to child protection policies and practices, and to bridge the gap that exists between statutory agencies and the BME community*
- **VCF calls for review of Child Protection System 2008**  
*VCF used its 2008 Annual Conference to call for government to review the Child Protection system, to include the process of serious case reviews - as the system was not working effectively at operational level for frontline staff*

## OUR WORK TODAY

### BRIDGING THE GAP: STATUTORY AGENCIES AND BME COMMUNITY

- **Working with community groups**, or directly with children, young people and families, to raise child protection awareness in the context of culture and faith within the legal framework of this country (*Seminars and workshops, outreach*)
- **Working with all children's services** to raise awareness of issues of safeguarding children across culture and faith (*Safeguarding conferences, multi-agency / sole agency seminars, in-house training, advocacy casework*)
- **Working with government and statutory agencies** to ensure the voice of the community is heard at strategic and policy decision-making level (*LSCB membership, strategic reviews and consultations*)

## SAFEGUARDING VULNERABLE GROUPS OF BME CHILDREN

BME communities are at risk of multiple disadvantages. "Despite considerable variation between different ethnic groups, factors of educational attainment, low income, employment and living in disadvantaged areas mean that people from Black and Minority Ethnic communities are at greater risk of multiple disadvantage than their white counterparts. "(Mind the Gap).

**Key Risk Factors;** poverty, mobility, isolation, area of deprivation, low education attainment (parents), parental mental health, domestic violence (impact on child), physical and mental health

Whilst these risk factors affect the adults in the family, the children are immediately more at risk due to their vulnerability.

## UNDERSTANDING CULTURE AND FAITH

- Understanding the 'protective' factor for families vs. statutory agencies...
- Developing awareness around certain practices such as physical chastisement, female genital mutilation (FGM), witchcraft and spirit possession, forced marriage, corrective rape
- Ability to implement good working practice around known common indicators
- Establishing links between emerging themes e.g. exploring links between trafficked children and ritual oaths

A broader approach — promoting child safeguarding and well-being – is more effective for engaging communities and churches than a narrow focus on 'belief' systems such as witchcraft or FGM

## WHAT BME PARENTS/CARERS TELL US...

Questions that have been asked during core assessments in relation to culture and/or faith include, but not limited to:

- What do you think about us – in the West?
- What do you think about the way we dress in this country?
- Have you been circumcised?
- Do you believe in witchcraft?
- Why does your child not celebrate Christmas?
- Why does your child not eat British food?

Knowledge and understanding of culture and faith is critical to effective assessments of harm. However, culture and faith should not be used as an excuse to abuse and must never take precedence over children's rights.

## STRATEGIC FOCUS ON FAITH AND CULTURAL SETTINGS

- Develop safeguarding policies and good working practice with children in faith and cultural settings
- Develop creative strategies to better safeguard children in highly diverse communities
- Engage with specialist organisations working with BME children, young people and families
- Adopt holistic and sensitive approach when dealing with culture or faith
- Allow adequate time to reflect/incorporate wider cultural aspects within assessments

UK has sound child protection framework;  
however good practice is not yet standard practice!

## OPERATIONAL FOCUS ON FAITH AND CULTURAL SETTINGS

- Develop culturally sensitive initial and core assessments
- Develop practical skills to work directly with children from black and minority ethnic communities
- Develop service plans that will meet the individual identity and cultural needs of children
- Develop awareness of some of the common issues facing black and minority ethnic children and their families
- Be prepared to question – do not readily accept information provided
- Determine when, where, why, who, and what to share

Develop culturally-sensitive approach within standard safeguarding practice



# VCF PROTOCOL

## Protecting children across culture and faith

- **Legislation and guidance**  
*Putting guidance into practice*
- **Linking key themes around culture and faith**  
*Let's not question 'belief' systems; work with families to highlight harmful practices to children*
- **Recognising culture and faith**  
*Develop a culturally sensitive approach within wider safeguarding practice*
- **Effective multi agency working**  
*The UK has a sound child protection framework; however good practice not yet standard practice!*
- **The Way Forward**  
*Effective community engagement; developing partnership links between statutory agencies and the community; involving families in child protection processes e.g. serious case reviews*