

Foreword

Mor Dioum, VCF Co-Founder and Director

VCF - The Victoria Climbié Foundation UK organisation emerged from the Victoria Climbié Family Campaign; founded to support the family of Victoria Climbié in their quest to seek justice and accountability for the failures, incompetency and negligence of the child protection system. We supported Mr and Mrs Climbié during the course of the Victoria Climbié Public Inquiry led by Lord Laming in 2003. With humility we offer the words of Mr and Mrs Climbié which aptly describe our role:

"As outsiders, we did not understand how the system worked. With the support, assistance and advice of The Victoria Climbié Foundation UK, we came to understand what had happened to our daughter, Victoria Adjo Climbié and the role and responsibilities of the agencies involved".

During 2003-2006 the Foundation was at an embryonic stage in regard to influencing child protection policies. Yet this aspect of the Foundation's work was frustratingly limited due to the constrictions of funding, but nevertheless we were involved in campaigning via the media and lobbying legislators in regard to strengthening the Green Paper 'Every Child Matters.' This is an area of work that the Foundation was keen to develop as it is vital that child protection policy is not directed by (and wittingly or unwittingly ends up serving) the needs of agencies with statutory powers rather than the needs of children.

Our focus has primarily (though not exclusively) been led by the needs of families and children from minority ethnic communities through legal advocacy case work associated with supporting users to raise child protection awareness and challenge inaction or poor practice and thus failings to protect children. In many such cases the Foundation has been successful in achieving change in agencies such that good practice is adhered to. The Foundation has been involved with and helps approximately 300 children and families each year.

VCF clients come from a wide range of ethnic backgrounds, and conflicts with statutory services are frequently exacerbated by cultural misunderstandings. Clients frequently suffer poverty and difficulties in their environment; they frequently have family conflicts and disruptions. The difficulties faced by these families and the often poor quality of communications with the statutory organisations mean that there is a significant need for VCF to intervene on the behalf of families.

VCF has developed a distinctive and robust model for working with these families through aiming to establish dialogue and better communications between clients and statutory services. For most clients the processes lead to improved outcomes through improved communication and the restoration of dignity, obtaining better resources to improve family difficulties, including access to better housing and better relationships between parents and children.

The reactionary and rapid removal of children into care has not always been in the best interest of that child. From our own anecdotal evidence, we know that punitive approaches

by some social workers have brought many cases into unnecessary proceedings that could have been avoided. Recent reports suggest that minority ethnic children in the care system are five times more likely to end up in the criminal justice system. We are concerned too around the approach to compartmentalising themes such as FGM, Witchcraft and Spirit Possession, Honour Killing, Child Sexual Abuse, Child Trafficking and so forth rather than addressing harmful practice within a wider safeguarding agenda. We urge social care management to offer greater support to front line practitioners, as the actions of some social workers have dampened the public's trust in the child protection system which has a detrimental affect in bringing about closer links between agencies – funded by the public purse to safeguard and protect children – and the community, where we have struggled to see the required increases in the reporting of child abuse.

We remain an independent organisation that has strengthened its capacity to respond to grass roots needs. The Foundation has begun to influence national safeguarding policies and procedures, through its advisory work and training programmes with statutory agencies and professional networks. We continue to campaign for the implementation of child protection reforms and remain at the forefront of political debate.

Reforms and developments from Laming to Munro continue to have a positive impact on improvements to the UK child protection system. However the challenges remain as we have continued to see cases that mirror Victoria Climbié; most notably Peter Connelly, Khyra Ishaq, Keanu Williams and Daniel Pelka. The same poor practices mentioned by Lord Laming continue to be the norm in some parts of the country as evidenced through VCF's advocacy case work. Again, we urge all children's services to adopt an objective child focused approach.

every child matters...