

Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service

Good Practice for Working With Faith Communities and Places of Worship – Spirit Possession and Abuse

Places of worship are often on the frontline when it comes to helping, and providing amenities for, children and families, both within their buildings and their local communities. This is recognised in *Working Together to Safeguard Children (2006)*, the government guidance for practitioners such as Children's Services (formerly Social Services).

The Executive Summary states that:

'Faith Communities provide a wide range of activities for children and, as such, should have appropriate arrangements in place to safeguard and promote their welfare.'

Faith communities need to ensure that they:

- adopt safeguarding policies and procedures
- follow procedures for safe recruitment
- ensure workers receive child protection training
- follow government guidelines in relation to safe working practice (e.g. *Safe from Harm (1993)* and *Working Together to Safeguard Children*)

Similarly Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) are expected to work with faith communities and others to safeguard children. They have a responsibility for making sure safeguarding arrangements operate effectively within their geographical jurisdiction. *Working Together to Safeguard Children* states that LSCBs should include representatives of faith groups. (Section 3.62). LSCBs can help ensure that faith communities and places of worship are supported in putting safeguarding arrangements in place, and that working relationships develop between the faith community and the statutory agencies.

Many faith communities have over time developed comprehensive safeguarding policies and procedures and have mechanisms in place for dealing with concerns about children, including reporting concerns and allegations of abuse to the statutory authorities. As well as government expectations and, in addition to the requirements of funding bodies, places of worship and faith communities need to have policies and procedures in place to meet the expectations of the Charity Commission and their insurers.

Some places of worship may not have adequate safeguarding policies and procedures in place and may need assistance in doing this. In addition, those working with children and families from faith communities in a professional capacity (e.g. Social Workers, Home Start or Sure Start Managers) may lack knowledge about the faith group or their practices, its structure, how it is organised, whether certain practices are faith related or cultural specific. It should be recognised that the vast majority of faith groups repudiate the abuse of children in any shape or form.

Faith communities are specifically addressed in Sections 2.152 to 2.155 of *Working Together to Safeguard Children*:

Faith communities

2.152 Churches, other places of worship and faith-based organisations provide a wide range of activities for children and young people. They are some of the largest providers of children and youth work, and have an important role in safeguarding children and supporting families. Religious leaders, staff and volunteers who provide services in places of worship and in faith-based organisations will have various degrees of contact with children.

2.153 Like other organisations that work with children churches, other places of worship and faith based organisations need to have appropriate arrangements in place for safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children of the kind described in paragraph 2.9. In particular these should include:

- procedures for staff and others to report concerns that they may have about the children they meet that are in line with "What To Do If You Are Worried A Child Is Being Abused" and LSCB procedures, as well as arrangements such as those described above; and*
- appropriate codes of practice for staff, particularly those working directly with children, such as those issued by the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS) or their denomination, or faith group*
- recruitment procedures in accordance with Safe from Harm (Home Office, 1993) principles and LSCB procedures, alongside training and supervision of staff (paid or voluntary).*

2.154 Churches and faith organisations can seek advice on child protection issues from the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS). CCPAS can help with policies and procedures; its Guidance to Churches manual can assist churches and its Safeguarding Children and Young People can assist other places of worship and faith-based groups

2.155 CCPAS provides a national (24 hour) telephone help line for churches, other places of worship and faith-based groups and individuals, providing advice and support on safeguarding issues.

Responding to faith communities where suspicions or allegations of child abuse are linked to belief in spirit possession and witchcraft

In 2007 H M Government published *Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession* (supplementary non statutory guidance) to help practitioners apply *Working Together to Safeguard Children* to the particular needs of children who may have suffered abuse or neglect due to a belief in spirit possession.

The key considerations in this guidance have been based on Government commissioned research undertaken by Eleanor Stobart. The subsequent report '*Child Abuse Linked to Accusations of Possession and Witchcraft*' was published in June 2006, following wide consultation with faith communities and other interested parties.

The key findings in Stobart's research were:

- Belief in 'Possession' and 'Witchcraft' is widespread
- 74 cases across England were identified with 38 analysed
- The identified cases amounted to only 0.1% of all child protection enquiries in 2003-4
- Abuse, however, included severe beatings, starving and burning
- Carers other than parents are often abusers
- Children with disabilities are vulnerable to abuse

Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession is aimed at all agencies working with children, but particularly to provide information and advice to practitioners to help them apply the principles contained in '*Working Together to Safeguard Children*' where children are abused or neglected due to a belief in spirit possession.

The guidance identifies four key areas for best practice:

- (a) Understanding the wider context of abuse
- (b) Early identification
- (c) Developing partnerships with communities
- (d) Working with places of worship and faith communities

This paper by CCPAS has been designed to help practitioners follow best practice in the four areas listed above. Its purpose is to inform and signpost to agencies with specific knowledge and experience in dealing with these issues.

Background

The Laming Inquiry into the murder of Victoria Climbié cited a systemic failure of all agencies charged with safeguarding responsibilities and resulted in the government's 'Every Child Matters' agenda, the Children Act 2004 and a revision of *Working Together to Safeguard Children*, which now includes a section on responding to cases of abused and/or neglected children linked to a belief in spirit possession and witchcraft.

The Laming Inquiry is widely acknowledged as the catalyst that prompted the uncovering of this little recognised problem. Victoria was subjected to extreme violence and cruelty by her great-aunt and boyfriend. They seem to have believed she was possessed by evil spirits. Since that time further cases have been widely reported on, including the conviction of three adults in 2005 for extreme cruelty towards a child, known as Child B.

These and other cases with similar characteristics are linked to Africa and cultural practices that intersperse custom, tradition and spiritual belief. Some times they include exorcism, also known as deliverance ministry or the casting out of demons. As the research highlighted, this practice is observed in various forms by many faith communities throughout the world including the established church (e.g. Church of England, Catholic church and other longstanding denominations), though the way it is carried out varies enormously and may not be regarded as abusive depending on how it is handled (e.g. language used, physical contact, whether the child is present and whether the child is ever accused to their face of being a witch/possessed) .

Other examples of criminal offences committed against children that are linked to particular beliefs include forced marriage and female genital mutilation. These practices are not always found together because they can also arise from unconnected beliefs and traditions.

Working in partnership with faith communities to safeguard children

We have already said, it is a requirement of LSCBs and set out in statutory guidance that they should engage with faith communities to ensure children are safeguarded. The following are examples of good practice that practitioners should consider when addressing safeguarding issues within faith communities:

- Ascertain exactly what the faith community believes and practices because they vary enormously
- Talk with faith leaders
- attend faith services and/or meetings

- seek help and advice from specialist agencies such as the CCPAS.
- Because some faith groups may be part of a larger network e.g. denomination or movement, try to find out what influence, if any, this has on the local group.
- Use the correct terminology for both the venue where the faith group meets, the name of the religious leader(s) (e.g. pastor, apostle, elder) and the type of services provided.
- Recognising that some faith communities may be influenced by faith groups outside the UK, gain an understanding of the structure under which they operate.

Safeguarding Children and Development Unit (Project Violet)

As a result of the Laming Inquiry, the Metropolitan Police Service (MPS) responded by setting up a dedicated team of police officers under the Child Abuse Investigation Command, working on prevention and partnership initiatives. This team is building expertise in areas of child abuse associated with emerging communities (e.g. communities set up by those arriving in the UK from the African Diaspora). In addition to faith based ritual abuse, their work with partner agencies includes other areas such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and child trafficking. The unit provides information and support to the MPS and other UK police services on prevention and partnership initiatives.

‘Safe and Secure’ - Ensuring the well-being of children and young people within the church community.

This free safeguarding booklet has been produced by CCPAS and the Metropolitan Police (Project Violet) , to enable churches, other faith communities, statutory and voluntary agencies access training resources and guidance on safeguarding children in a faith context. It has been endorsed by Children’s Minister Rt. Honourable Beverley Hughes MP. This booklet has been sent to every LSCB, and many partner agencies.

Congolese Pastorship UK

As a response to safeguarding issues within the Congolese communities the Congolese Pastorship was formed. With the assistance of CCPAS they have produced a safeguarding policy and signed a safeguarding pledge in 2007 in front of the Children’s Minister committing themselves to the protection of children.

Over 200 churches are now part of the Congolese Pastorship. The Congolese Pastorship can be contacted through CCPAS.

Who are the agencies that can help?

In order to develop partnerships with communities and work with places of worship and faith communities, practitioners will need assistance in identifying different faith groups, their beliefs, customs and practices. Whilst the focus has been on African communities it needs to be recognised that many faiths have a belief in witchcraft and possession (See E Stobart's Research Report, *Child Abuse Linked to Accusations of Possession and Witchcraft*). It is also important to recognise that within a faith there may be many different beliefs and practices.

The following agencies can be contacted for support and advice:

AFRUCA

Africans Unite Against Child Abuse is an organisation focusing on alleviating cruelty against the African Child. They promote the welfare of African children in the UK. They also work in partnership with other organisations in Africa and across Europe. The organisation was set up as a platform to advocate for the welfare of African children.

AFRUCA's aims are to:

- Raise the profile of African children in the UK, and create awareness of their needs in ways that promote a positive climate for change.
- Ensure that children are aware of the risks of abuse, know their rights, and have skills to protect themselves.
- Promote positive parenting among African parents and others who care for children.
- Increase the understanding of service providers and those with leadership roles in relation to African communities about the risks of abuse to African children, and promote the development of appropriate services, practices, and support to African families.
- Influence the development of policy and regulatory action in ways that will safeguard African children.

Contact details:

AFRUCA - Africans Unite Against Child Abuse
Unit 3D/F Leroy House
436 Essex Road

London N1 3QP

Tel: 020 7704 2261

Fax: 020 7704 2266

Email: afuca@googlemail.com

Web: <http://www.afuca.org>

Safeguarding Children and Development Unit (Project Violet)

Project Violet can be contacted through the links below:

www.met.police.uk/scd/specialist_units/child_abuse.htm

Email: violet@met.police.uk

Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS)

CCPAS has been advising places of worship and faith communities in safeguarding since the 1980s. Its services include:

- 24 hour telephone helpline
- safeguarding training seminars
- DVD- based safeguarding training
- other resources including a comprehensive safeguarding manual
- assistance to places of worship in developing safeguarding policies and procedures.

In addition CCPAS provides specialist help in relation to the safe supervision and support of sex offenders attending places of worship. It acts as an advisor to central government, LSCBs, the police and probation (MAPP), and specialist agencies such as the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre of which it is a partner agency.

CCPAS is also an umbrella body for the Criminal Records Bureau carrying out 22,000 checks a year, and provide a consultancy service where there are blemished disclosures.

Specifically in relation to supporting places of worship and faith communities in relation to abuse linked to a belief in spirit possession, CCPAS can assist professionals as follows:

CCPAS has a Communities Consultant, Bob Pull, who has made significant in-roads in developing safeguarding within faith communities. (A former Detective Inspector in the Metropolitan Police, Bob was the operational lead of Project Violet)

CCPAS has provided training for hundreds of African church leaders and workers, and continues to do so, on a weekly basis.

CCPAS supported the development of the Congolese Pastorship UK as a response to safeguarding issues within Congolese communities, and continues to do so.

CCPAS can be a first port of call for any agency, and can then advise or signpost to any other relevant agency, or faith community. CCPAS is unique in its work with faith groups across the UK, ranging from established churches with Christian denominations to independent places of worship with no particular allegiance to any group.

Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service (CCPAS)

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Swanley

Kent BR8 7UQ

Tel: 0845 120 4550

Fax: 0845 120 4552

Email: info@ccpas.co.uk

Web: <http://www.ccpas.co.uk>

It is acknowledged that other agencies in the voluntary and statutory sector are working in this area of child and vulnerable adult safeguarding. However, each of the mentioned organisations has a wealth of information that can assist practitioners and other interested individuals or organisations. They will either provide advice and /or support within their area of expertise or alternatively signpost to an appropriate individual or organisation depending on the information or services required.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Department for Children, Schools and Families

Working Together to Safeguard Children: A guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children.pdf (1237.88 Kb)

Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession

Metropolitan Police

Relevant documents to follow

London Safeguarding Children Board

Community Partnership Project – final report.

http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/files/conference07/community_partnership_project_30_nov_2007.pdf

Community Partnership Project – training PowerPoint

http://www.londonscb.gov.uk/files/resources/cpp/cpp_presentation_jan_2008.ppt

Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service

Safe and Secure <http://www.ccpas.co.uk/What%20We%20Provide.htm>

The Christian Church & Child Protection - An Overview

<http://www.ccpas.co.uk/Articles/Christian%20church%20overview.htm>

Congolese Pastors' Pledge

<http://www.ccpas.co.uk/Documents/Caring%20Summer%202007.pdf>

FAQ's Why doesn't CCPAS challenge the belief that children are demon possessed?

<http://www.ccpas.co.uk/Documents/Demon%20Possessed.pdf>

See also Media Information

<http://www.ccpas.co.uk/Press%20Releases.htm>

AFRUCA - Africans Unite Against Child Abuse

Relevant documents to follow

London School of Economics

Relevant documents to follow

NSPCC

Faith, Religion and Safeguarding
NSPCC Internal Briefing Paper
Helen Edwards

http://www.nspcc.org.uk/inform/trainingandconsultancy/consultancy/helpandadvice/faithreligionandsafeguarding_wdf47840.pdf

NSPCC
Weston House,
42 Curtain Road,
London
EC2A 3NH.

Other faith organisations

Churches Together in England – Minority Ethnic Affairs

Church denominations

Muslim Parliament

Muslim Parliament paper on Forced Marriages
<http://www.muslimparliament.org.uk/marriage.htm>

Child Protection in Faith-based environments A Guideline Report Dr Siddiqui
march 2006

<http://www.muslimparliament.org.uk/Documentation/ChildProtectionReport.pdf>

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