
National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

**The National Working Group on
Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief**

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Introduction

1. This action plan is intended to help raise awareness of the issue of child abuse linked to faith or belief and to encourage practical steps to be taken to prevent such abuse. It has been developed through partnership on the National Working Group between central government and local statutory partners, faith leaders, voluntary sector organisations and the Metropolitan Police.
2. Our top priority is the protection of children and young people. This plan makes absolutely clear the importance of identifying children who are suffering or are likely to suffer harm and of taking action to keep those children safe. We are clear that this is not about challenging people's beliefs, but where these beliefs lead to abuse that should not be tolerated.

Who is the action plan designed for?

If you are a child or young person, we hope this plan will reinforce the importance of staying safe and being resilient when you are faced with people who might try to harm you because of their belief in magic or the supernatural. We want you to support your friends and peers too if they are ever in that position. **Remember, you can always ask for help from an adult you trust, staff at your school or a police officer. You can also call ChildLine on 0800 1111 if you are worried about anything and want to talk to someone.**

If you are a parent, or a member of a community or faith group, this plan is for you to think about how well you keep children in your care safe. It is never acceptable to harm a child, no matter what you may believe – this is what you should be saying to all those around you. Leaders in community and faith organisations should also use this plan as a prompt to ensure you are addressing risks of harm to children. You will also find encouragement to work closely with statutory services through your Local Safeguarding Children Board.

If you are a children's social worker, police officer, health professional, or in any other role where you may be responsible for dealing with child protection concerns, this plan is for you to think about how best you can tackle abuse linked to faith or belief – and to take steps towards that goal. Some of the actions will be ones you can begin to work on straight away in your area. Others you may simply want to use as a prompt for actions you can develop yourself, following through the format of the action plan to identify locally your own understanding of the problems and possible solutions, strategies for 'making it happen', the outcomes you hope to see and the partners you will work with to achieve these.

There are questions throughout the action plan to help you to do this.

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Scope

3. This plan aims to address certain kinds of child abuse linked to faith or belief. This includes: belief in concepts of witchcraft and spirit possession, demons or the devil acting through children or leading them astray (traditionally seen in some Christian beliefs), the evil eye or djinns (traditionally known in some Islamic faith contexts) and dakini (in the Hindu context); ritual or muti murders where the killing of children is believed to bring supernatural benefits or the use of their body parts is believed to produce potent magical remedies; and use of belief in magic or witchcraft to create fear in children to make them more compliant when they are being trafficked for domestic slavery or sexual exploitation. This is not an exhaustive list and there will be other examples where children have been harmed when adults think that their actions have brought bad fortune, such as telephoning a wrong number which is believed by some to allow malevolent spirits to enter the home.
4. This plan does not include in scope child abuse within culture or faith contexts in general. So it does not seek to address female genital mutilation, forced marriage, excessive physical punishment or abuse relating to gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nationality, disability or other differences recognised within social or cultural beliefs. Nevertheless, it may be helpful to tackle several of these wider cultural or faith issues in combination locally. Nor does this plan consider child abuse in religious or faith settings which are incidental to the abuse, for example, sexual abuse by paedophiles within a religious community.
5. The plan is titled 'action plan to tackle abuse linked to faith or belief', in order not to exclude those examples of abuse described above as in scope. On the title alone it may be assumed to be broader in scope than it actually is, however there is no satisfactory term between the narrower 'witchcraft or spirit possession' and the broader 'faith or belief' concepts. This plan is entirely about protecting children from harm and we hope readers will forgive any choice of terminology which they feel does not fit well with the complex and varied set of circumstances which comprise this type of abuse.

Understanding the issue

6. The beliefs which are the focus of this action plan are not confined to one faith, nationality or ethnic community. Examples have been recorded worldwide among Europeans, Africans, Asians and elsewhere as well as in Christian, Muslim, Hindu and pagan faiths among others. Not all those who believe in witchcraft or spirit possession harm children. Data on numbers of known cases suggests that only a small minority of people with such beliefs go on to abuse children. Under-reporting of abuse is, however, likely. Data may also reflect closer scrutiny of communities in which cases typifying this kind of abuse have been seen.
7. There are some common features where faith or belief is a factor in

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abuse. Firstly, there is sometimes a wider social or community consensus that witchcraft, for example, actually exists. Sometimes a faith leader or other influential figure is at the centre, promoting the belief and methods of resolving the supposed problem by harming children. Parents or carers have also been key perpetrators in many of the known cases. This can make the abuse harder to find out about, harder to get evidence to prosecute and harder to prevent in future.

8. There is also the internal logic of the belief, which in the case of spirit possession, for example, is that the child is the victim of a supernatural force and the abuse is therefore understood by perpetrators as a means of saving the child – driving out the devil – in other words perpetrators may perversely believe that they are doing the right thing. Even where there is no intention to save the child, the belief that the child can harm others can generate a real fear in those who would normally be expected to protect the child, including parents or close family. This fear that a child may cause harm to, or kill, siblings, parents and other family or friends can be a critical factor in the abuse.
9. In some cases there are also real-world factors underlying the abuse. This is sometimes described as the scapegoating of children to reconcile misfortune that has occurred to the family or community, such as an adult family member becoming unemployed or being in poverty. In these situations, those who are different because they have some special traits (such as being particularly bright, having difficult behaviour, having a disability or children living away from their parents) are the target of scapegoating, being accused of having caused the misfortune by supernatural means. The most vulnerable people within a group offer the least ability to resist being scapegoated, and children are a group who are inherently vulnerable, needing protection from adults around them.
10. The approach to tackling this kind of abuse must be focused, as with all kinds of child abuse, on keeping the child safe and on bringing the perpetrators to justice, but it must also involve emotional and intellectual engagement with those individuals, families and in some cases faith or other communities whose belief underlies the harm. As stated earlier, we are clear that we do not challenge people's beliefs, but where these beliefs lead to abuse that should not be tolerated. In addition, wider engagement with faith and other communities can help to bring shared understanding of, for example, children's rights, positive parenting and approaches to behaviour management, disability and learning difficulties, which can help to give parents and others better ways to deal with day to day difficulties they face.
11. This introduction can only provide a brief insight into what is known about abuse linked to faith or belief. For further information please refer to the good practice guidance *Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession*, published in 2007. For links to this document and to other guidance and research studies, please see the useful resources section at the back of this action plan.

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How this action plan came about

12. In early 2011, the issue of abuse and neglect resulting from accusations that children were witches or possessed in some migrant African communities in England was raised with Tim Loughton MP, Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families by Debbie Ariyo, Chief Executive of AFRUCA. The Minister held a roundtable in February to discuss the issue, with participants from AFRUCA, the Victoria Climbié Foundation, the Congolese Family Centre, CFAB, CCPAS, Trust for London, the London Safeguarding Children Board (SCB), the Metropolitan Police and the Crown Prosecution Service.

The discussion recognised:

- that this issue is broader than just abuse related to witchcraft or spirit possession, because abuse linked to belief can occur within, but equally is condemned by people from, all cultures, communities and faiths;
 - the importance of tackling child abuse linked to belief alongside other types of abuse including child trafficking and abuse related to culture and faith, such as female genital mutilation, honour based violence and forced marriage, and in the context of the Government's reforms in response to the Munro Review of child protection; and
 - the need to build on existing good work and our developing knowledge of this issue, working in partnership and with communities themselves to develop solutions.
13. The participants agreed to set up a National Working Group which would explore the problem further and identify possible solutions. The Working Group, which was chaired by the Department for Education, has met eight times and held three small-group sessions in 2011-12 which resulted in this action plan.
 14. The action plan aims to encourage activity both nationally and locally to raise awareness and understanding of abuse linked to faith or belief, develop the skills of practitioners and to support communities themselves to prevent such abuse. The actions are a combination of the ideas of all partners on the Working Group and reflect what we hope to achieve together, each of us contributing our effort and expertise where it will have most effect. This is however a national action plan for England that we hope will be of use to all the partners across the statutory and voluntary, community and faith sectors and not just those on the Group.
 15. During 2011 and early 2012 some key achievements of the partners were:
 - In May 2011, a Trust for London / London SCB '*Safeguarding Children's Rights*' initiative, exploring belief in witchcraft and spirit possession in London's African communities.

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- In November 2011, an AFRUCA international conference on '*Witchcraft Branding, Spirit Possession and Safeguarding African Children*'.
 - In December 2011, the London SCB launched the London Culture and Faith Local Safeguarding Children Board (LSCB) Strategy, Training Toolkit and Practice Guidance, concluding their *Pan London Safeguarding Children Minority Ethnic Culture and Faith Project*.
 - In January 2012, the Metropolitan Police led sessions on 'Understanding Faith and Cultural Abuse' at the Association of Chief Police Officers National Child Protection and Abuse Investigation Conference.
 - In March 2012, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Children and Trust for London held an awareness-raising event on this type of abuse.
 - In April 2012, AFRUCA and Chuka Umunna MP held a summit on abuse of children of African heritage linked to belief in witchcraft or possession.
16. In 2012 we hope to see more successes as we start to implement this action plan, including a literature review commissioned by the Department for Education to draw together what is known about the issue of abuse linked to belief and communications activity to key audiences.
17. Many people reading this plan will be aware of the murder of Kristy Bamu, a victim of abuse by adults whose belief in witchcraft was a critical factor in his death. The trial and subsequent conviction of the perpetrators received a great deal of media coverage in early 2012, approximately one year after the proposal for this action plan had been agreed. That case did a great deal to raise understanding of this type of abuse, but may also have led to a sense that it is something which only takes place in certain communities or faiths. That view is something we hope this action plan will begin to correct.

Evaluation

18. The most recent independent evaluation of work in this area was published in 2011 by Stephen Briggs, et al., whose report, *Safeguarding Children's Rights: exploring issues of witchcraft and spirit possession in London's African communities*, looked at the effectiveness of four projects funded by Trust for London over four years specifically focusing on African communities in London and led by AFRUCA, the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service, the Congolese Family Centre and the Victoria Climbié Foundation. This report provides critical learning which should be taken into account in future projects or activity by statutory and non-statutory partners. Among the findings was a recognition of the importance of engaging with faith leaders and of training to help build understanding. It was also seen that a broader engagement with

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communities is more effective than narrower engagement on the issue of witchcraft and spirit possession – for example it found that empowering women in faith organisations, and in the community generally, can have positive effects in reducing and challenging abuse.

19. This action plan is intended to build on what has already been done to raise awareness of safeguarding and of the issues around abuse linked to faith or belief. It also aims to facilitate relationships within and between national and faith communities and statutory partners to reinforce safeguarding practice and, ultimately, to lead to fewer children suffering from abuse at the hands of those whose belief in supernatural phenomenon forms part of the cause. These aims can all be measured in different ways, although it is difficult to get a full and accurate picture of what is actually happening at two points in time to measure progress. The biggest difficulty is that this is largely a hidden crime and our most direct measure of prevalence is of known incidences from police and other records. When this data suggests increases, we do not necessarily know whether that is a result of increased cases of abuse or that more of the abuse is being found.
20. The Working Group will review progress over the period of implementation of the action plan. All those involved in implementing aspects of the plan will be encouraged to evaluate their work and to feed back to the Group where possible. Consideration will be given to producing a progress report in one year's time.

How to read the action plan

21. The plan which follows is organised into four themes: engaging communities; empowering practitioners; supporting victims and witnesses; and communicating key messages. For each theme, as a result of the discussions in the Working Group, key problems or issues have been identified. There are 16 of these in total.
22. The table sets out a solution to each problem which the Group believes would help to address the issue, breaking it down into actions and describing how partners could go about making a reality of these. There is then a description of the outcomes the Group hopes to achieve in implementing the actions. Finally, the plan records which of the National Working Group members have indicated a willingness to take forward work in relation to this action and the timescale over which action will be undertaken. It is important to recognise that action by Working Group members alone will not be enough to bring about the changes we wish to see. This plan does not record action by wider partners, but there is scope for you to develop your own actions for your area and we hope that all those who read it will see their role in contributing to addressing this issue.
23. The action plan includes a number of short case studies profiling some of the work already being undertaken to tackle abuse linked to faith or

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belief. Most of the case studies were offered by members of the Working Group while others were included in view of their relevance to strands of work in the action plan. These case studies are illustrations of what can be done, rather than models which should be adopted in their entirety. Contact details have been included alongside each one so that you can follow-up with any questions as you design your own activities.

24. The action plan will continue to be reviewed and revised by the Working Group during the period of implementation.

Acknowledgements

25. The Working Group is responsible for this action plan, however we would like to thank those whose advice and contributions have helped to inform our thinking and ultimately improve the content of the plan. In particular we would like to thank former members of the Working Group, Kay Bell, John Carroll, Pretash Gohil, Lena Parmar, Chris Pelham, Nicky Rayner and Vicky Washington. We would also like to thank those individuals and organisations who commented on earlier drafts of the action plan. Finally, we would also like to thank Tim Loughton MP, Minister with responsibility for child safeguarding, for his support for the Working Group and this action plan.

The rest of this document provides details of the actions and outcomes the Group aims to achieve, the key messages we will communicate and some useful sources of further information.

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Engaging Communities

This strand of the plan focuses on the activity with and within communities where there may be belief in spiritual forces and where abuse linked to this belief may take place. The term community is a very generic one, and by it we simply mean any group of people who can be defined as such, whether by faith, ethnicity, nationality or other means. We understand that within any community there will be differences in belief, and possibly many sub-communities linked to these distinctions in belief or resulting from other factors such as friendships, social or economic status and so on. It is appropriate that those carrying out work identified in this plan decide which communities will be the focus for their activity based on local information and evidence.

The first action in this strand emerged as one of the early issues the Working Group identified in their workshop sessions, namely that there is relatively little actually known about the nature, scale and frequency of this type of abuse. Terminology is not well defined and there is very little research done within and in partnership with communities. The Department for Education has commissioned a small-scale literature review to try to establish what is currently known about this type of abuse, building on a previous report based on primary research commissioned in 2006 and carried out by Eleanor Stobart (see 'Useful Information' section). It is hoped that this will provide a common understanding on which to communicate further about this issue and also possibly a basis for further specific research which any academics or other partners may wish to consider.

The second action is in many ways the most important, that of ensuring the voices of children and young people are heard and that they understand well their rights and develop resilience to manipulation or abuse by others. It has not been possible to speak directly to children in creating this action plan, however most of the members of the Working Group have direct contact with children, including victims of abuse linked to faith or belief and the family, peers and wider communities of those children. The subsequent actions deal with wider aspects of engagement with families, communities and faith organisations. Individual organisations on the Working Group have identified specific work that they wish to undertake within their own communities or communities they are keen to work with.

Do you know what to do if you are worried a child is being abused?

Do you have a good understanding of whether this type of abuse may be occurring in your area?

How well do professionals and faith and community leaders work together to address safeguarding concerns locally?

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Case studies

The **Congolese Family Centre** (CFC) successfully developed a youth forum which has been active in promoting young people's awareness and understanding of children's rights, particularly relating to abuse linked to spirit possession and witchcraft. Alongside its parenting workshops, this has contributed to the creation of a network of families and young people speaking out against abusive practices.

CFC has worked with Congolese TV in the UK (with an estimated audience of 15,000) to develop 48 programmes which meant that constructive media coverage of the issue was generated.

CFC's youth forum has produced a contemporary drama to help raise awareness about abuse linked to spirit possession and witchcraft. Setting the drama against an everyday background has brought the issue to life for audiences.

Contact CFC on: tel. 0208 245 7026, email contact@congolesefamilycentre.org or visit the website www.congolesefamilycentre.org/.

The **Pan-London Safeguarding Children Culture and Faith Project**, led by the London Safeguarding Children Board, involved all 32 Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs). It aimed to promote a step-change in safeguarding London's children living in minority ethnic, culture or faith communities or groups. Interviews and focus groups across the 32 LSCB areas gathered views on how to improve safeguarding for these children, and mapped activity and aspirations for stronger partnership work.

Project work was undertaken by 11 LSCBs along with their local communities, faith groups and third sector agencies. The projects in Newham and Enfield explored beliefs and child abuse linked to labelling of children as 'possessed', with the local evidence leading to a focus on the Muslim community and African Christian communities.

The project has produced a report, a guidance document, a training toolkit and an LSCB engagement strategy to assist minority ethnic communities and faith groups in protecting their children and working with statutory services to do so. The link to these documents can be found in the 'Useful Information' section of this plan.

Contact the London Safeguarding Children Board on: tel. 020 7934 9714, email ian.dean@londoncouncils.gov.uk or visit the website www.londonscb.gov.uk/.

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CCPAS (The Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service) is an independent Christian charity which provides a comprehensive safeguarding service to churches and other faith groups. CCPAS also advise a wide variety of statutory agencies and non-faith organisations, including central government, Local Safeguarding Children Boards, Children's Social Care, Adult Social Services, the Police, the Probation Service, Health Services and voluntary bodies.

CCPAS have worked over a number of years to provide support and child protection training for African churches and have a dedicated Communities Consultant. Aims of this work included: 1) identifying and engaging with African churches in London; (2) providing child protection awareness training to church leaders, children's workers and carers; (3) establishing safeguarding policies and good practice guidelines to be used across communities; 4) providing on-going advice and support through project workers and mainstream CCPAS services; and (5) liaising with other stakeholders in production of written material that promotes the rights of children and reinforces safeguarding messages. Independent evaluation of this project found that the work of training African church leaders "...has strengthened the knowledge and capacity to apply child protection frameworks."

CCPAS has trained over 4000 African church leaders in safeguarding between 2007 and 2011. As a result, many churches have made changes to improve children's safety and well-being including ensuring all relevant personnel are CRB-checked. In one such training event over 800 church leaders attended. As a result of this training CCPAS received many calls to their helpline for assistance with safeguarding matters. CCPAS has also worked in partnership with the Metropolitan Police Project Violet and the Congolese Pastorship in developing a safeguarding policy and in June 2007 the Pastorship signed a safeguarding pledge at a special ceremony.

Contact CCPAS on: tel. 0845 120 4550, email info@ccpas.co.uk or visit the website www.ccpas.co.uk.

Recognising that language can be a barrier to keeping children safe, especially for families that are new to the UK, the **NSPCC** worked with members of the Black African Francophone community to produce a resource to give adults in that community information in their own language on what to do if they are worried about a child. This resource was distributed nationally to community organisations and other professionals working with those groups. The NSPCC has also supported community initiatives to tackle faith-based child abuse through awareness-raising workshops, distributing information resources, and hosting and participating in events to share knowledge and expertise in child protection.

Contact NSPCC by visiting the website www.nspcc.org.uk.

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VCF – **The Victoria Climbié Foundation** emerged from the tragic death of Victoria Climbié, the result of ritual abuse by her guardian in this country and the systematic failure of statutory bodies to prevent this abuse.

In 2004-05, a pilot study commissioned by the Metropolitan Police to work with African and South Asian communities, enabled VCF to offer an insight into how the community was dealing with child abuse. The study provided the first template for the Community Partnership Project adopted by the London Safeguarding Children Board in 2006, and led to the creation of Project Violet.

Since 2007, VCF has demonstrated improved capacity and skills to provide support to BME families and children where there are child protection concerns based on belief related to spirit possession, with the development of its 'casework' and 'outreach' processes. Through direct referrals from the community, statutory services and solicitors, VCF provides an independent advocacy service, and assessments for the courts.

VCF works in partnership with Local Safeguarding Children Boards to engage local communities. A safeguarding children community partnership model has been pioneered by the Victoria Climbié Foundation in collaboration with Safeguarding Children Boards in two London boroughs. This is a model for community consultation, engagement and collaboration to improve communications between statutory agencies and community and faith groups, to ensure that the voice of the community is heard by strategic and policy decision-makers. The VCF model was piloted in the Pan London project, and is at the heart of the LSCB Culture and Faith strategy.

In 2012, VCF worked alongside the Metropolitan Police to protect and support family victims and witnesses during the investigation into the death of Kristy Bamu, the most recent case of reported ritual abuse in this country.

Contact VCF on: tel. 020 8619 1191, email enquiries@vcf-uk.org or visit the website <http://vcf-uk.org/>.

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AFRUCA (Africans Unite Against Child Abuse) works directly with families of African origin to support parents to keep their children safe and to help them to be successful. This is achieved by promoting positive parenting skills, providing knowledge about child protection, offering support to parents with children in the child protection system and providing information about issues that affect African communities in the UK. A particular focus is to help those parents understand child development, so that they can recognise common difficulties children might have and know where to seek practical help. This work has been valuable to a number of families whose children have disabilities or learning difficulties and behavioural problems and who may in the past have interpreted these traits as a sign of witchcraft or spirit possession. Work has been ongoing since 2007 and over 2000 parents have benefited. In June 2012, AFRUCA published a Manual on Child Protection for African Parents in the UK, bringing together advice on safeguarding and parenting for the benefit of this community.

AFRUCA has established the **Working with Faith Organisations to Safeguard African Children in Yorkshire & Greater Manchester** project, covering the towns of Bradford, Leeds and Sheffield and Greater Manchester. The five year project consists of:

- Child protection training sessions for community and faith leaders, faith workers and members of congregations to educate them about child protection in the UK.
- Working with faith groups to conduct child protection audits of their organisations.
- Working with faith groups to develop child protection policies and procedures to ensure they comply with statutory requirements for keeping children safe.
- Training staff on how to conduct continuous risk assessments of their policies and implement changes.
- Holding advice clinics for members of the congregation who need advice on parenting and on child protection.
- Producing and disseminating a range of child safeguarding material for community and faith organisations, including on witchcraft and exorcism, child trafficking and private fostering.

Contact AFRUCA on: tel. 0844 660 8607, email via www.afruca.org/contact-us/42-email-us.html or visit the website www.afruca.org.

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Engaging Communities						
	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
1	Some gaps in understanding of the scale, nature and prevalence of abuse linked to faith or belief. Communities not involved in research, missing opportunity for empowerment	Conduct further research and learning that informs practice and involves communities	<p>Initial work to understand what already exists – a literature survey or collation of research findings on what is known about this type of child abuse</p> <p>Subject to the outcomes of that work, there may be need for:</p> <p>(1) Research into how practitioners and communities respond when issue arises</p> <p>(2) Research or surveys into understanding of faith leaders</p> <p>(3) Research on best responses by services – generate case studies, evaluating what works</p>	<p>Important role for Local Safeguarding Children Boards to understand the nature of safeguarding risks in their areas</p> <p>Involve communities in doing research, providing skills</p> <p>Train researchers in working within the community / within their own communities.</p> <p>Communicate the findings (create directories of contacts, collate information on a central web page)</p> <p>Involve faith groups, including to train researchers</p> <p>Links to having a faith network will be vital (Action 2) and Comms Strategy (Action 16)</p>	<p>A better sense of the prevalence of abuse linked to belief – good practice identified</p> <p>Communities able to take responsibility</p> <p>Better collaboration between social workers and communities</p> <p>Potential partners identified, e.g. community champions</p> <p>Awareness raised widely</p> <p>Key messages from research used in Comms</p>	<div style="background-color: #ADD8E6; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Working Group Members:</div> <p>DfE (a literature review); Trust for London (share knowledge); CFAB; AFRUCA; VCF (research for Met Police); CCPAS (research)</p> <p><i>Review in Spring 2013</i></p> <div style="background-color: #DDA0DD; padding: 5px;">Action by partners in your area:</div>

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	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
2	Not enough focus on children or listening to their views	Promote and hear the voice of children and young people as part of existing broader work on this agenda	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Opportunities for children and young people to do work themselves on safeguarding issues relevant to them 2. Adults would benefit from training on children's participation 3. Children and young people also need to learn to protect themselves from this type of abuse when they feel it is happening to them. There are many campaigns on bullying which can be modelled 4. Enabling children who have been victims (or adults abused in this way as children) and their peer groups to tell their stories and communicate these in appropriate ways 	<p>Engage children from within marginalised groups in society, for example children looked after by local authorities, trafficked children, children who are privately fostered, young parents and those with learning difficulties or disabilities</p> <p>Engage with relevant organisations leading on children's rights and voice, for example the Office of the Children's Commissioner</p> <p>Create a training pack of stories, e.g. for schools.</p> <p>Promote through arts, e.g. drama and poetry</p>	<p>Evidence of children's experiences in their own words informs practice. Lessons are learned</p> <p>Children reporting abuse</p>	<div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #e1f5fe; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Working Group Members:</div> <p>Congolese Family Centre, VCF and AFRUCA work with victims</p> <p>NSPCC</p> <p>Some WG members are working with LSCBs, LAs and the National College for School Leadership to link to schools</p> <p><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <div style="border: 1px solid black; background-color: #e1bee7; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;">Action by partners in your area:</div>

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	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
3	Need for clear messages and a community-led solution. Need to identify influential potential champions	Develop a network of faith leader champions and a network of community leader champions	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Build new network – (AFRUCA developing African Elders Council) or use existing faith organisations and the networks of Working Group members (Peace International facilitating a forum for francophone faith leaders) 2. Go beyond Working Group members' networks to other faith organisations – Christian, Muslim, Hindu and others. Tailored approach, working through their structures and hierarchies, approaching key 'gatekeepers' 3. Develop a culture and faith protocol (London SCB, VCF) 4. Develop means for community members to raise concerns about faith leaders who promote this type of abuse – police to consider, e.g. a 'faith link' scheme 5. Engage those who are marginalised or disempowered – for example where social or faith settings are male-dominated, empowering women may contribute to helping them voice their concerns 	<p>Identify community and faith based organisations – mapping</p> <p>Recognise faith and faith leaders as part of the solution</p> <p>Befriend and build relations. Engage on a broad set of children's wellbeing issues, with witchcraft as one element</p> <p>Safeguarding manual or guidance for faith organisations, with translations</p> <p>LSCBs' outreach with faith groups – use LSCB model as a structure for a faith network. Include faith reps in multi-agency training (e.g. MACIE)</p> <p>Faith leaders to identify potential champions and give them roles raising awareness</p> <p>Develop messages to LSCBs</p> <p>Role for the Child Protection and Safeguarding Network facilitated by DfE for voluntary sector safeguarding grant recipients.</p>	<p>A network or networks exist and involve a wide range of leaders who are vocal in public debate about child safeguarding and abuse</p> <p>Safeguarding issues are known and spoken about – including beyond faith leaders to faith members and families</p>	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>Faith leaders on the Working Group will reach others nationally</p> <p>WG communication with local areas e.g. LSCBs with faith or culture safeguarding networks</p> <p><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>

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	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
4	Need to reduce vulnerability to influence by faith leaders who promote this type of abuse	Build resilience in families, communities and among faith leaders	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Needs to focus on early help for children and the 'team' of support and services around the child 2. Peer support model in communities and schools 3. Broader public messages 4. Encourage each faith community to develop its own standards, including common child protection non-negotiables alongside distinct community behaviour and faith expectations. A template for developing faith standards and good practice examples could be shared widely 5. Improve access to information about existing support services for children and families (e.g. behaviour management specialists, services for children with disabilities and learning difficulties) 	<p>Youth leaders working together within communities – creating opportunities for young people to speak and learn about safeguarding issues, e.g. where they do or don't feel safe in the community</p> <p>Important to work with local networks and through specific cultural and social events that offer windows of opportunity for engaging communities. Also emphasise the positive role that local media can play</p> <p>LSCB sponsored faith networks</p> <p>Network of 'model' faith leaders (action 3)</p> <p>Good practice: VCF community engagement model; Project Violet; Parent Champions in Enfield working with Congolese community; LSCB Faith and Culture Strategy</p> <p>Link to supporting victims (actions 14/15)</p> <p>Peace International developing a community faith standard</p>	<p>Greater resilience – willingness to stand up to faith leaders who promote this type of abuse</p> <p>LSCB faith networks</p> <p>Better understanding of rights</p>	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>Metropolitan Police; VCF; Peace International; CCPAS; AFRUCA</p> <p><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
5	Lack of knowledge of safeguarding and skills among parents and communities	Encourage safeguarding training for parents and communities	<p>1. Signpost to existing training and materials and support their use in two areas:</p> <p>(a) Bespoke training (e.g. on witchcraft, but make links to children's rights and related child abuse issues such as trafficking) – include strategies that parents can use</p> <p>(b) Generic training (safeguarding, parenting, e.g. CCPAS 'Safe and Secure' DVD)</p> <p>2. Identify forums for training – e.g. conferences, road shows</p>	<p>Faith and community leaders to work in schools to raise children's understanding about faith, culture and safeguarding</p> <p>Access to faith leaders through LSCB faith lead, multi-faith forums</p> <p>LSCBs evaluate regionally and locally, oversee training quality</p> <p>Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) teams and lead faith person could cascade</p> <p>Map existing training – e.g. CCPAS, VCF, AFRUCA, Peace International cultural training in the community; African Families Service specialist training</p>	<p>Children, parents and communities better able to recognise abuse and to protect themselves / their children</p> <p>Evaluate success of training</p>	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>CCPAS; VCF; AFRUCA; DfE; ADCS and other members</p> <p><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>
	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
6	Lack of funding to support small-scale work within communities	Encourage community grants for awareness-raising work	<p>1. Identify the range of organisations who may fund work in this area – mapping exercise</p> <p>2. Raising awareness amongst potential funders about this issue</p>	<p>VCS organisations best placed to raise awareness among funders and make the case for funding – using research to promote agenda</p> <p>Identify funders, e.g. Comic Relief, The Lottery and the Mayor's Fund. Consider approach to engaging them, for example one-to-one or a 'funder's conference'</p> <p>Joint funding bids, voluntary sector organisations working in partnership</p> <p>DfE to signal the value of community investment to LSCBs and commissioning bodies</p>	<p>Raised awareness among potential funders leading to grants being made</p>	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>VCF, AFRUCA and other members</p> <p><i>Review in Spring 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

Empowering Practitioners

This strand of the plan aims to help make those on the frontline in safeguarding and wider services better equipped to understand and respond well to situations where abuse linked to faith or belief is anticipated or occurs. With understanding should come reduced anxiety about carrying out child protection roles in the context of different belief systems where concepts such as witchcraft exist. This should improve assessments and interventions, for example in enabling those carrying out assessments to differentiate better between mental health problems, which may be a factor in abuse linked to belief, and belief which is normal within cultural or faith systems. Practitioners should also reflect on how their own personal perspectives and beliefs affect their approach when responding to allegations relating to this type of child abuse.

Local Safeguarding Children Boards (LSCBs) provide the strategic leadership for safeguarding children in any area. On this issue, we know that LSCB partners from local authority children's services and from the police have played a key role in some areas of the country. This has been particularly evident in London where the Metropolitan Police have issued specific advice to their officers on this type of abuse and record data on allegations of child abuse where belief in witchcraft, spirit possession or similar phenomena are believed to be a factor. However research has concluded that this "*...should not be considered a London problem.*" (Stobart, 2006) and cases have also been identified in the South, the North and in the Midlands. One point of caution for statutory services outside London is that research has often concentrated on finding cases in London, potentially skewing the data away from cities and other areas outside the capital.

The Working Group has a particular interest in both police and children's services nationally, and will work with partners in those sectors in order to carry forward those actions. The importance of working with partners in the health sector, in education, in youth work and elsewhere is also recognised. In all of these sectors there are significant changes or structural reforms underway, not least in response to the need to continue to deliver effective services in constrained financial circumstances. In the case of child protection and frontline children's social work, the Munro Review published in May 2011 recommended a substantially new approach which is currently being implemented. This action plan, with its focus on a specific kind of abuse with particular characteristics, seeks to help practitioners to be more effective within the real professional, organisational and financial contexts in which they work.

As a professional with a responsibility for safeguarding children, would you recognise the signs to spot when a child is vulnerable to this type of abuse? If not, you may want to refer to the national guidance for more details – see the 'Useful Resources' section.

Is this issue being recognised and addressed by your Local Safeguarding Children Board?

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

Case studies

The Metropolitan Police's **Project Violet** was set up to tackle violence against children linked to a belief in witchcraft or spirit possession in London. The remit of the project has been expanded to include any violence linked to a faith or belief and the team provide information and support to the Metropolitan Police and other UK police services on prevention and partnership initiatives.

In recognition that police officers may be unlikely to be able to spot signs that a child might be in danger of abuse linked to a belief in witchcraft or spirit possession, Project Violet has written guidance notes for police officers across London on helping children accused of witchcraft and sorcery. They are happy to share this document nationwide if it proves effective. This guidance details the kind of language and terms used by people who accuse others of sorcery, advises on what signs officers should look for to gauge whether a child is at risk and how to refer any concerns to their local child abuse investigation team.

Contact the Metropolitan Police SCD5 Partnership Team (Project Violet) on: tel. 0207 161 3822 / 3848 / 3813 or email violet@met.police.uk.

Children and Families Across Borders (CFAB) is a charity which identifies and protects children who have been separated from family members as a consequence of trafficking, abduction, migration, divorce, conflict and asylum, as well as other vulnerable individuals in often desperate circumstances. CFAB is the UK branch of the International Social Service network.

The following is an example of a case on which CFAB have advised statutory agencies.

A young child believed to be from the Democratic Republic of Congo came to the attention of Children's Services in a northern English city. Health services initially raised concerns because the child had sustained severe physical beatings. It was believed that the child's uncle, who was caring for him, was responsible. The child was taken into care and the uncle was charged with assault occasioning actual bodily harm. The uncle talked of the child needing "fixing", that the child was "bad" and had something "wrong" inside him. The child is now subject to a full care order and is in long term fostering. The uncle has disappeared.

Contact CFAB on: tel. 020 7735 8941, email info@cfab.uk.net or visit the website www.cfab.org.uk.

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

Over the past 5 years **Peace International** has facilitated training, and provided information to francophone and Congolese churches working with children and families. This charitable company was originally created to respond to development and human rights abuse in Africa, and specifically in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but it has identified a need for advocacy and promotion of understanding between statutory services and the Congolese community in the UK as well.

Information sharing and guidance has helped faith organisations and community groups to work with frontline social workers, police, health workers and others. Training for, and dialogue with, frontline practitioners has enabled them to gain a working knowledge of the community, culture and religious practices of African francophone and Congolese people. Training has explored concepts of childhood, gender and belief in witchcraft and spirit possession. Feedback from practitioners has been positive. Peace International have cooperated in the development of a tool for child protection which is being used to strengthen child protection in many churches. Peace International regularly host meetings with faith leaders to monitor the safeguarding needs of Congolese faith organisations.

Contact Peace International: email Jeanbosco@peaceinternational.org.uk or visit the website www.peaceinternational.org.uk.

The **Victoria Climbié Foundation** undertakes assessments of cases involving abuse linked to faith or belief. The following example is one such case.

A Black African child lived with her grandparents before moving at the age of 10 to live with her father in the north of England. When she was 13, local authority children's social care removed her from her father's care as he believed her to be a witch and she was showing signs of neglect, although no physical abuse. The Victoria Climbié Foundation undertook a court-directed independent assessment of the situation. Although they determined that the belief system was clearly present, ultimately it was not deemed to be a significant risk, the key issue being the father's ability to appropriately parent his child. VCF recommended a package of support and counselling for the child and her father.

Cultural issues must be considered within core assessments to inform decision making. If knowledge is limited, practitioners can make use of local community advice, such as that provided by specialist organisations.

Contact the Victoria Climbié Foundation on: tel. 020 8619 1191, email enquiries@vcf-uk.org or visit the website <http://vcf-uk.org/>.

AFRUCA work in partnership with practitioners in the statutory sector to give them in-depth, specialist training on religious and cultural practices so that they gain the skills and confidence to support families where there are concerns of faith based abuse. Training courses have led to practitioners becoming more confident in challenging the practices in their places of work. More than 300 frontline staff including social workers, health professionals, teachers and police have been trained over the course of a year.

Contact AFRUCA on: tel. 0844 660 8607, email www.afruca.org/contact-us/42-email-us.html or visit the website www.afruca.org/.

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

Empowering Practitioners						
	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
7	How to ensure that all social workers develop greater understanding of culture and faith safeguarding issues	Encourage initial social work training providers and providers of CPD to cover culture and faith safeguarding issues in their courses. Signpost them to further advice.	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage education providers to raise understanding of this issue within initial training as part of culture and faith safeguarding issues (including, forced marriage, FGM and honour based violence, etc.) and trafficking 2. Encourage education providers to cover this topic within CPD, with LSCB strategic oversight of need for and availability of training 3. Encourage development of bespoke training offers to social workers on specific issues of abuse linked to belief 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage with College of Social Work and universities <ol style="list-style-type: none"> (a) CFAB working with Greenwich University to develop a course assignment (b) VCF working with a university to offer social work placements. Capture and disseminate the learning 2. For CPD, there are links to Munro recommendations, the work of the Social Work Reform Board, the College of Social Work – already some changes in train to strengthen social workers’ knowledge, skills and abilities <p>Raise awareness among social workers’ managers and educators of the availability of training and materials</p>	<p>Modules for existing curriculum and CPD are taken up by providers and lead to better practice</p> <p>Placements for social workers with VCF lead to better understanding, shared education providers</p>	<div style="background-color: #d4f1d4; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black; margin-bottom: 5px;">Working Group Members:</div> <p>CFAB; DfE</p> <p><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <div style="background-color: #d4baf7; padding: 5px; border: 1px solid black; margin-top: 5px;">Action by partners in your area:</div>

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
8	How to ensure greater understanding among frontline practitioners in universal services (e.g. health, police and education) of faith and culture safeguarding issues	Engage with frontline practitioners in universal services on a range of faith and culture safeguarding issues, including abuse linked to belief	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Health - support training and awareness-raising among health practitioners in hospitals and the community 2. Metropolitan Police to work on frontline police engagement in London and via ACPO to share good practice nationally 3. Work with individual schools and services; messages to schools and wider children's workforce through existing networks; training of teachers in religious beliefs and practices in BME communities 	<p>Most effective when there are in-house staff with a clear role and training is available</p> <p>Engagement with practitioners who have specialist roles should be tailored to their understanding</p> <p>Work with professional health bodies to reflect key messages in health professional education and training. VCF to approach RCN, RCGP, RCPCH and CEM to explore ways of doing this, making links with the intercollegiate safeguarding framework</p> <p>VCF working with the National College to develop messages and communicate to school leaders. Also working with schools in a borough to raise awareness of child protection, including abuse linked to belief where relevant</p> <p>Possible to involve children's charities with broad national reach and links to schools, e.g. ContinYou</p>	<p>Universal services are receptive</p> <p>Learning captured from initial work</p> <p>Better understanding of the phenomenon</p> <p>Frontline practitioners better able to spot unexplained injuries within the context of faith-based abuse</p>	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>DfE; VCF; AFRUCA; Met Police working with ACPO ; CCPAS, ADCS and others</p> <p>Messages by all members of the Working Group</p> <p><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
9	Need for greater contact between faith communities and LSCBs	Encourage LSCBs to provide strategic leadership and to work to secure the meaningful engagement of local and faith communities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Engage with network of independent chairs of LSCBs – fact-finding to understand current position on, for example, the number of LSCB lay members from local or faith communities or the number of LSCB faith sub-groups 2. Subject to outcome, review action 3. Identify areas of good practice among LSCBs for sharing – e.g. LSCB accreditation of safeguarding procedures of faith and community groups 	<p>DfE to engage with network of LSCB independent chairs</p> <p>Establish how many LSCBs have lay or faith members, what kind of individuals and how they use them – including on LSCB faith or community sub-groups. Establish how many plan to recruit, recruitment process, etc. Raise awareness of these roles in faith communities</p> <p>Encourage LSCBs to map faith organisations in their area</p> <p>LSCBs raise their profiles and awareness of safeguarding issues including abuse linked to faith or belief through community events and local press.</p>	<p>Feedback from Working Group members and LSCBs that there are more faith lay members</p> <p>LSCBs take accountability for this issue</p>	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>DfE and London SCB (working with the LSCB Chairs network); CCPAS for faith networks: ADCS</p> <p><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
10	Abuse linked to belief is not recognised as a child protection issue by some child protection practitioners	Raise awareness so that robust, comprehensive multi-agency initial assessments are carried out leading to informed decisions in this type of case	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. DfE messages to ADCS, LSCBs 2. ADCS/LSCBs cascade to improve frontline practice 3. Encourage social work training providers to cover this topic in their training (action 7) 	<p>Agree on the messages to communicate</p> <p>Reinforce these through (local) training – to ensure social workers and others are supported in their roles</p> <p>Some links to how inspection is carried out – to reinforce good practice</p> <p>Multi-agency working (including, where appropriate, UKBA, DWP and NGOs)</p>	Better understanding, more referrals, more investigations and more appropriate investigations	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>DfE; London SCB; CFAB; ADCS; Met Police. Plus other sectors, e.g. health</p> <p><i>Review in Spring 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>
	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
11	Barriers to recovery for child victims of faith-based abuse	Develop approaches to support and re-integration for victims – including psychological and therapeutic support	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Encourage research organisation to consider undertaking work in this area 2. Promote awareness of statutory and other services which can support children – Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), SEN and disability services, etc. 3. AFRUCA, working with Newham CAMHS and London SCB, aim to establish a project to support victims of witchcraft abuse 	<p>Funding/resource needed – work subject to there being organisations willing to pursue this area</p> <p>Promote the issues among those who might develop victim support or therapeutic models or may have existing models</p> <p>Where appropriate to their local population, LSCBs to work with local commissioners to input into and to influence strategic planning and commissioning of local services for children who have been subject to this type of abuse as part of wider services to support children who have been abused</p>	<p>Understand what is desirable for victims – therapeutic and other support models</p> <p>Strong evaluation of a pilot</p> <p>Families respond positively to the initiative</p>	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>CFAB; Trust for London; AFRUCA; Newham SCB with London SCB on CAMHS</p> <p><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
12	Practitioners not seeing the role of belief in witchcraft or spirit possession in abuse cases – missing the signs that belief is part of the context of a case	Develop an understanding of underlying issues and indicators of abuse	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Share existing indicators and warning signs of this type of abuse and its faith context used by the Met and in DfE guidance 2. Consider opportunities to further refine indicators or develop example case narratives – for sharing with practitioners 3. Understand the links to broader cultural concerns and other harmful practices linked to faith and culture 	<p>Review these indicators in the Working Group and consider next steps – possible amalgamation of indicators to produce something to share and raise awareness with</p> <p>Develop a mechanism for signposting or a work based tool on the internet</p> <p>Quick reference guides</p> <p>Capture and share learning from recent cases – for statutory, voluntary and faith organisations and other audiences.</p>	<p>Practitioners better able to identify abuse and respond where belief is a factor</p> <p>Practitioners are more able to make linkages and spot recurring themes</p> <p>More reporting of abuse</p>	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>VCF; Metropolitan Police, London SCB</p> <p><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>
	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
13	How to increase the profile in inspections of children's services of this issue. How to increase the likelihood that inspections will assess the effectiveness of local authorities in relation to abuse linked to belief	Improve understanding among inspectors and thus impact of inspection on children at risk of, or being harmed by, abuse linked to faith or belief	<p>Work that Ofsted have already started on unannounced inspections of arrangements to protect children</p> <p>Encourage Ofsted also to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. signpost children's services inspectors to information about this type of abuse 2. consider conducting a thematic inspection of international cases in a future survey programme subject to resources and priorities at that time 	<p>Ofsted continue to make available inspection shadowing opportunities for senior local authority staff from children's services</p> <p>Ofsted continue to build on their expertise with inspectors seconded for up to two years from local authority children's services</p> <p>Working Group Secretariat to offer an article on this area of abuse for Ofsted's internal staff bulletin to children's social care inspectors and signpost to further information</p>	<p>Inspectors are able to access information on abuse linked to faith or belief</p> <p>Inspection teams are able to draw on the expertise of inspectors who have worked in local authority children's social care services</p>	<p>Working Group Members:</p> <p>WG community or faith members; DfE</p> <p><i>Review in Spring 2013</i></p> <p>Action by partners in your area:</p>

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Supporting Victims and Witnesses

This strand of the action plan reflects a genuine concern among Working Group members that victims of this crime are left scarred by their experiences. Often young and vulnerable to start with, victims suffer from abuse at the hands of those they may be expected to trust. Those children may also share a belief in the supernatural with their abuser including that they are, or are possessed by, an evil force. This perceived reality must be truly terrifying for a child. Those children need a great deal of support to come to terms with and recover from the abuse, part of which is recognised in action 11 in the preceding section. The children of perpetrators may also be victims and in need of support. This strand focuses on how those child victims can be helped to get justice and to play their part within the criminal justice system.

The range of special measures which can be made available to children is extremely important in helping to reduce the trauma of being a witness in a judicial process. The support of the police and of children's services is also critical for those victims. In particular, the actions around improving understanding among frontline practitioners of this type of abuse will help to make that support more effective, as will cultural training about the faith or community involved in any given case.

If you are involved in supporting children who have been victims of child abuse linked to faith or belief, what difficulties have you overcome in your role? Would you be willing to share your experiences with the National Working Group to disseminate more widely?

In your area, how do you contribute to making your community welcome to all children, and a safe place for them to grow up in?

Case studies

The **Victoria Climbié Foundation** (VCF) supports victims of abuse linked to faith and their families. One case is described below:

Eunice Spry, a person of devout faith living in Gloucester, abused Christopher and his siblings over a period of nearly 20 years, believing the children, who she was fostering, were possessed by the devil. VCF worked directly with Christopher after his foster mother was sentenced. He wanted to share his experiences so that lessons could be learned and spoke at the VCF Annual Conference in 2008. He also documented his experiences in a book entitled, 'Child C'.

Contact the Victoria Climbié Foundation on: tel. 020 8619 1191, email enquiries@vcf-uk.org or visit the website <http://vcf-uk.org/>.

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

Special measures and support for young and vulnerable witnesses. Judges and magistrates are expected to take an active role in the management of cases involving vulnerable witnesses and intimidated witnesses. Courts can help to ensure that arrangements and reasonable adjustments are in place for young witnesses in advance of the trial to alleviate some of the stress and anxiety associated with giving evidence.

There are also a number of 'special measures' available to support vulnerable and intimidated witnesses give their best evidence in court. Children and young people under 18 are automatically eligible for special measures.

The special measures available for use singly or in combination at the discretion of the court include: **live links** – allowing a witness to give evidence outside the court room or remotely; **screens** – to ensure that the witness does not see the defendant when giving evidence; **evidence in private** – allowing the courtroom to be cleared of people who do not need to be present while a witness gives evidence (in cases involving a sexual offence or where someone has tried to intimidate, or is likely to try to intimidate, the witness); **removal of wigs and gowns** worn by judges and lawyers in Crown Court cases; **communication aids** – to assist a witness overcome physical difficulties with understanding or answering questions (for example, alphabet boards and sign boards); **intermediaries** – someone approved by the court to communicate to the witness the questions the court, defence and prosecution ask (explaining them if necessary), and then communicate the answers the witness gives in reply; and **video recorded “evidence in chief”** – allowing an interview with the witness, which has been video recorded before the trial, to be shown as their main evidence.

The Witness Intermediary Scheme was set up by the Ministry of Justice to implement the intermediary special measure. It provides police forces and the CPS with Registered Intermediaries – specially trained professional communication specialists accredited by the Ministry of Justice. The Witness Intermediary Scheme is available in all 43 police forces and CPS areas in England and Wales and to date has assisted in over 5,500 cases involving vulnerable witnesses, many of which would not have otherwise gone to trial.

Pre-trial familiarisation visits to the court should also be explored with every witness as part of the undertaking of a detailed needs assessment. The visit will enable witnesses to familiarise themselves with the layout of the court, court officials and their roles, the facilities available in court, discuss any concerns and demonstrations of any special measures applied for and/or granted.

Contact the Ministry of Justice via their website: www.justice.gov.uk.

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

Supporting Victims and Witnesses						
	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
14	Lack of support for victims who become witnesses in the judicial system	Encourage provision of community support for witnesses	<p>1. Empower the community to provide support when community members are facing the prospect of seeking justice through the judicial system</p> <p>2. Raise awareness in the community of access to special measures</p>	<p>Ongoing work to support witnesses led by the Ministry of Justice</p> <p>Consider scope for looking at community-based support for witnesses, e.g. providing independent advocates</p> <p>Consider building on Independent Domestic Violence Advisors (IDVA) model, and VCF experience of cases</p> <p>Link to action 15, join-up between criminal justice and safeguarding</p> <p>Link to action 11, on support and re-integration for victims</p>	<p>More victims and community members testify</p> <p>Greater support for witnesses from the system – use of special measures, Registered Intermediaries, etc.</p> <p>Greater support from communities for those who act as witnesses</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Working Group Members:</p> <p>The Metropolitan Police; Trust for London (on the model); AFRUCA; VCF (support victims)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Action by partners in your area:</p>
	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
15	More work could be done to improve the number and success of prosecutions	Promote more join-up between criminal justice and safeguarding	<p>Encourage awareness-raising for police and judges on how to deal with cases of abuse linked to belief – making links with trafficking, missing children, child sexual exploitation, etc.</p> <p>Encourage agencies to consider tackling faith leaders who promote this type of abuse on the basis of any crimes they may have committed, for example financial fraud</p>	<p>Build on work done by the Crown Prosecution Service with AFRUCA on understanding offences which are relevant for this type of abuse</p> <p>Engage with MoJ as the lead Government Department for the judiciary – explore raising of awareness within judiciary</p> <p>DfE to engage with UK Border Agency re cross-border movement of children and existing approaches to identifying trafficking</p>	<p>Increased awareness and greater likelihood of successful prosecutions</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">Working Group Members:</p> <p>AFRUCA; Met Police (with police nationally); DfE; VCF</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Review in Autumn 2013</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">Action by partners in your area:</p>

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Communicating Key Messages

This strand of the action plan emphasises the importance of engaging with communities and practitioners as well as the media and general public in order to build better understanding of the rights of children and resilience to those who would abuse them. It also recognises the necessity of having well informed responses and responsible public discourse when abuse does happen.

Case studies

Members of the **Working Group on Child Abuse linked to Faith and Belief** which produced this action plan agreed media lines for use by any of its members who were interviewed following the Kristy Bamu trial. The Working Group wanted to make sure that they conveyed a consistent message about faith-based child abuse. By doing so, they hoped to counter any public misconceptions and inform balanced media coverage.

Contact the Working Group Secretariat at the Department for Education on: 0370 000 2288, or visit the website www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus/dfc.

AFRUCA established a “**Safeguarding African Children Network**” to provide an opportunity for mutual learning and support among African communities and faith organisations interested in the safeguarding of African children in London. The Network also aims to bring to the attention of policy makers and practitioners issues regarding the protection needs of African children and their own experiences in addressing them. Feedback from the network informs the delivery of AFRUCA’s National Training programme for Practitioners Working with Black African Children and Families. The Network has attracted staff from voluntary and statutory agencies, such as the Medical Foundation, the International Organisation for Migration and Westminster Befriend a Family, who want to learn about safeguarding of African children from grassroots African organisations.

AFRUCA are leading a campaign for regulatory action in relation to ‘rogue pastors’ who accuse children of being witches or possessed by evil spirits. As part of the campaign, AFRUCA carried out a consultation on support for a law to make it an offence to brand children as witches. A majority of the 285 people consulted were in favour of a law, which they felt would complement other areas of work such as training for parents and practitioners.

Contact AFRUCA on: tel. 0844 660 8607, email via www.afruca.org/contact-us/42-email-us.html or visit the website www.afruca.org.

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Communicating Key Messages						
	Problem	Solution	Actions	Making it happen	What will change?	Action by
16	<p>Public understanding limited by media coverage which is often unqualified and focuses on this type of child abuse as ‘other worldly’</p> <p>Lack of dialogue between practitioners and communities</p>	<p>Develop communications and messages shared across the partners</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Workshop with DfE comms expert 2. Develop positive comms messages 3. Coordinate with Project Violet, using existing channels and piggybacking on planned events 4. Sustain comms – develop events/activity planner 5. Develop signposting to existing resources 	<p>ACPO, DfE and Working Group members – develop messages, build on existing comms and messages</p> <p>Develop products – simple briefings and signposting to sources of help, e.g. CCPAS quick reference guides, London SCB paper on where to get help, VCF products</p> <p>Cascade messages to partner organisations (College of Social Work, partner networks)</p> <p>Make links across to London SCB trafficking toolkit</p> <p>Proactive press/media engagement – articles in local or sector press, e.g. in Community Care on ‘where to go for help’</p> <p>Messages communicated in a culturally appropriate way (choice of substance, style, terminology and images). Use of faith and community media</p>	<p>Some people discouraged from carrying out abuse</p> <p>May be more referrals and some prosecutions</p> <p>More qualified and balanced reporting – improving understanding</p> <p>Better communication and understanding between practitioners and communities</p>	<div style="background-color: #f080f0; padding: 5px; margin-bottom: 5px;">Working Group Members:</div> <p>DfE – coordinate, with partners each playing a role</p> <p>London SCB; VCF (experience of public interest cases)</p> <p><i>Agree strategy in Summer 2012. Review in Spring 2013</i></p> <div style="background-color: #d8bfd8; padding: 5px; margin-top: 5px;">Action by partners in your area:</div>

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

The National Working Group on Child Abuse Linked to Faith or Belief

Chair

Jeanette Pugh (*until 24.7.2012*)

Alan Reiss (*from 24.7.2012*)

Department for Education

Members

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Det. Chief Inspector Sue Inwood

Metropolitan Police Service

Pastor Jean Bosco Kanyemesha

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Stephanie Yorath

Programme Director, Victoria Climbié
Foundation

Secretariat

Marcus Starling, Jean Pugh and Maureen Brown, Department for Education

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

Key Messages: child abuse linked to faith or belief

Child abuse is never acceptable wherever it occurs and whatever form it takes. Abuse linked to belief, including belief in witchcraft or possession, is a horrific crime which is condemned by people of all cultures, communities and faiths. [The Government / my organisation] applauds the work being done in communities to tackle this form of abuse and to stand up to the perpetrators.

Key messages

- **Child abuse is condemned by people of all cultures, communities and faiths, and is never acceptable under any circumstances.** Child abuse related to belief includes inflicting physical violence or emotional harm on a child by stigmatising or labelling them as evil or as a witch. Where this type of abuse occurs it causes great distress and suffering to the child.
- **Everyone working or in contact with children has a responsibility to recognise and know how to act on evidence, concerns and signs** that a child's health, development and safety is being or may be threatened, especially when they suffer or are likely to suffer significant harm.
- **Standard child safeguarding procedures apply and must always be followed** in all cases where abuse or neglect is suspected including those that may be related to particular belief systems.
- **The number of cases of child abuse linked to a belief in spirits, possession and witchcraft is small**, but where it occurs the impact on the child is great, causing much distress and suffering to the child. It is likely that a proportion of this type of abuse remains unreported.

Research commissioned by the DfE in 2006 reviewed child abuse cases that had occurred between 2000 and 2005 to identify any cases where the abuse was linked to accusations of possession or witchcraft. 38 cases involving 47 children were found to be relevant and sufficiently well documented. The children came from a variety of backgrounds including African, South Asian and European.

- **Child abuse linked to faith or belief may occur where a child is treated as a scapegoat for perceived failure.** Whilst specific beliefs, practices, terms or forms of abuse may exist, the underlying reasons for the abuse are often similar to other contexts in which children become at risk. These reasons can include family stress, deprivation, domestic violence, substance abuse and mental health problems. Children who are different in some way, perhaps because they have a disability or learning difficulty, an illness or are exceptionally bright, can also be targeted in this kind of abuse.

National action plan to tackle child abuse linked to faith or belief

Useful Resources

Guidance on safeguarding, faith and belief

Safeguarding Children from Abuse Linked to a Belief in Spirit Possession, Department for Education, 2007. This guidance was issued under the previous government. Non-statutory, good-practice guidance for practitioners applying 'Working Together' to cases of abuse linked to belief (NB *Working Together* is currently being revised).

www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationdetail/page1/DFES-00465-2007

The *London Culture and Faith LSCB Strategy, Training Toolkit and Practice Guidance*, London Safeguarding Children Board, 2011.

www.londonscb.gov.uk/culture_and_faith/

Good practice for working with faith communities and places of worship – spirit possession and abuse, Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service.

www.ccpas.co.uk/Documents/faith%20communities%20guidance.pdf

CCPAS also have: a 24 hour telephone helpline on 0845 120 4550; an e-mail contact, info@ccpas.co.uk; and a twitter account, @theCCPAS.

Guidance on support for child witnesses

Provision of Therapy for Child Witnesses prior to a Criminal Trial: Practice Guidance, CPS, Department of Health and the Home Office, 2001. Provides assistance for children's services professionals and lawyers.

Achieving Best Evidence, Ministry of Justice, 2011. Guidance on interviewing victims and witnesses, and guidance on using special measures.

Vulnerable and Intimidated Witnesses: a Police Service Guide, Ministry of Justice, 2011. Guidance for the police service on conducting video-recorded interviews with vulnerable and intimidated witnesses, and supporting such witnesses during the criminal justice process.

Details of these publications can be found on the Ministry of Justice website: www.justice.gov.uk/victims-and-witnesses

Research

Safeguarding Children's Rights: exploring issues of witchcraft and spirit possession in London's African communities, 2011.

Stephen Briggs, et al. (University of East London, The Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust, Centre for Social Work Research, Trust for London).

www.trustforlondon.org.uk/media-centre/news/launch-of-safeguarding-childrens-rights-report.html

Child abuse linked to accusations of "possession" and "witchcraft", Eleanor Stobart, 2006. Research commissioned by the Department for Education.

www.education.gov.uk/publications/standard/publicationDetail/Page1/RR750

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Websites of Working Group member organisations

AFRUCA	www.afruca.org
ADCS	www.adcs.org.uk
CAADA	www.caada.org.uk
CFAB	www.cfab.uk.net
CCPAS	www.ccpas.co.uk
Churches Together in England	www.cte.org.uk
The Department for Education	www.education.gov.uk
The Congolese Family Centre	http://congolesefamilycentre.org
The Home Office	www.homeoffice.gov.uk
The London SCB	www.londonscb.gov.uk
The Metropolitan Police	http://content.met.police.uk/Home
The NSPCC	www.nspcc.org.uk
The Peace Alliance	www.peacealliance.org.uk
Peace International	www.peaceinternational.org.uk
Trust for London	www.trustforlondon.org.uk
The Victoria Climbié Foundation	www.vcf-uk.org

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Other useful websites

The United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child (UNCRC)

www2.ohchr.org/english/law/crc.htm

Information about the UNCRC on the Department for Education website

www.education.gov.uk/childrenandyoungpeople/healthandwellbeing/b0074766/uncrc

The Independent Safeguarding Authority, whose role is to help prevent unsuitable people from working with children and vulnerable adults

www.isa.homeoffice.gov.uk

The Crown Prosecution Service helps and supports young victims and witnesses of crimes in court cases

www.cps.gov.uk/victims_witnesses/young_victims/index.html

The Children's Commissioner for England

www.childrenscommissioner.gov.uk

ChildLine, a service run by the NSPCC for children and young people providing advice about a wide range of child protection issues

www.childline.org.uk/Pages/Home.aspx

The Safe Network, which provides information and resources to help keep children safe

www.safenetwork.org.uk

Information about Eno's Story, a children's fiction book dealing with the issue of witchcraft accusations. www.cassavarepublic.biz/our-authors-mainmenu-100/ayodele-olofintuade/enos-story