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Building on strengths

Protecting and promoting the welfare
of children and young people
in faith-based settings

Conference report



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Building on strengths

**Protecting and promoting the welfare
of children and young people
in faith-based settings**

**Report on a conference held on
Tuesday, 16 October 2007
NSPCC National Training Centre, Leicester**

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Bishop Dr Joe Aldred, Minority Ethnic Christian Affairs (Churches Together in England)

Yair Cohn, The Clubhouse

Parmi Dheensa, Include Me TOO

Heather Harvey, Amnesty International

Abd Al-Rahman, In-volve

Eleanor Stobart, consultant

Young people and workers from Restoring Lives

About the conference

Background

Faith groups always want to do the best for children and young people in their communities, and there are many examples of good work. However, more needs to be done, particularly in ensuring that safe and supporting practices are implemented across the board.

Faith groups should have access to information, resources and skills so that they can respond effectively to the needs of children and pro-actively influence policy and practice. Organisations and agencies working with faith groups should also play their part in helping these groups build on their strengths to ensure better outcomes for children and their families.

The NSPCC believes that developing partnerships with faith groups and stakeholders is a starting point for addressing the issues that impact on the lives of BME (black and minority ethnic) children and to improve support and services to families. In January 2007 the NSPCC hosted a seminar for stakeholders to discuss key issues in relation to safeguarding children in BME and faith-based settings. From this seminar a working group was formed of individuals from faith-based and voluntary community organisations, statutory agencies and the NSPCC. Its purpose was to plan a national conference, “Building on strengths”, to further explore these issues.

Purpose and themes

The conference provided the opportunity to share information, ideas and learning to support faith-based groups, voluntary and statutory agencies in working together to protect and promote the welfare of BME children and young people in faith settings. It was organised around the following themes:

- new ways of working with faith communities, and the links between spirituality and safeguarding
- ways of supporting parenting in faith settings
- promoting the participation and inclusion of children and young people in decision-making within faith settings
- promoting positive outcomes for children in faith communities
- current research and policy.

Key points arising from the conference

- The role of faith groups in safeguarding children is underdeveloped and we must find ways to maximise this potential.
- We must encourage participation at every level of faith organisations, including listening to children and providing opportunities where possible for involving them in decision-making.
- Training must be made more accessible across the board and resources shared.
- Faith groups could provide more safe spaces for children.
- A user-friendly child protection policies/procedures flowchart could be helpful to faith groups.
- Spirituality is an important element in children's lives, which must be considered and respected.
- Local authorities need to evaluate their work against the five Every Child Matters outcomes, and faith organisations should also show how their work contributes to these outcomes.
- There is a need to learn to utilise faith teaching to connect to safeguarding issues.
- There is a need to use the traditional values of family life as a positive aspect in helping children.
- We must all be someone to turn to for children.

Conclusion

Religious and faith-based groups have and will continue to have an important role in supporting children and families in BME communities. Safeguarding children is now firmly on the agenda in many faith-based organisations. Children and young people themselves have a valuable role to play in shaping activities and services in faith settings. It is recognised that collaboration is a valuable tool in reaching out to faith groups and promoting the Every Child Matters framework. However, there are still many challenges. More needs to be learnt about tackling harm to children where religious structures are a barrier. We all have our part to play in supporting faith groups and keeping children safe.

Recommendations

These recommendations arose from the speakers' presentations, discussions and workshops held during the conference. It is intended that they should be implemented across faith-based groups, voluntary organisations and statutory agencies, to strengthen the work that has already started and to bring improvement to the way BME children and their families are supported.

1. Social care professionals need to find creative ways to build relationships and trust with faith groups in order to support them in their work with children and families.
2. More research should be carried out on spirituality and family traditions, and their impact on safeguarding children.
3. Faith groups should seek to involve children and young people when making decisions that impact on their wellbeing.
4. Faith groups and statutory and voluntary community sector agencies should work together to develop a diverse multi-faith strategy for tackling harmful practices that put children at risk in faith-based organisations.

Presentations

Chair's introduction and opening remarks

Bishop Dr J. D. Aldred, executive director for minority ethnic Christian affairs, Churches Together in England

Bishop Aldred opened the conference by stressing the importance of learning and joint working: isolation is bad all around, as it means that great ideas are never shared and poor practices perpetuated.

Although the government is concerned with children, Bishop Aldred said that we also need to invest in them, to be mindful of their background and give the best to them. He gave the example of black Caribbean children who enter secondary schools like other children but often underachieve, calling on schools as well as parents to recognise their strengths and for all children's needs to be met, including those with disabilities.

Finally, he called on delegates to take responsibility for informing those who were not attending the conference of the lessons and messages learned from this day.

Safeguarding black and minority ethnic disabled children in faith settings

Parmi Dheensa, executive director, Include Me TOO

Include Me TOO is a national initiative to promote the rights of BME disabled children.

Many people feel excluded from a society that is increasingly secular and even from their own communities. The 2001 census nevertheless shows that 76 per cent of people claim to have a faith or religion. Religious groups are recognised as having an important role to play in promoting the rights of BME disabled children and in providing access to participation. The key for change is attitude, and the recognition that faith communities do matter in bringing about change.

Parmi has established links with faith groups, developing contacts beyond the regular nine-to-five day, visiting faith groups at key times when activities are taking place (eg, prayer) to enable families to speak about issues that are affecting them. This also creates an opportunity for exchange between service providers and families with disabled children who have felt excluded from services in the community because of others staring at them, or because they cannot access facilities.

In searching for shared values to promote the welfare of all children within religious groups, Parmi often uses quotations from sacred text of the relevant religion to emphasise the “golden rule”:

- Buddhism: “Just as a mother would protect her only child with life, even so let one cultivate a boundless love towards all beings.” (Kuddaka Patha from Melta Sulta)
- Christian: “Do to others as you would have them do to you.” (Luke 6:31)
- Islam: “No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself.” (An-Nawawi’s Farly Hadith 13)

Five years ago, only a few professionals within statutory agencies would visit faith organisations on their gathering days, but more are doing so now. The important point is that it enables families to tell professionals what is a safe environment for them.

Parmi suggests the following discussion points for faith groups:

- What are your attitudes towards disability within your faith community?
- Are they based on religion or tradition?
- Do you have an understanding and awareness regarding disabilities?
- How do you promote inclusive practice within your faith setting?

Some religious beliefs appear to covertly associate disability with sin. It is important to shift this attitude and recognise that disability is not a sin or punishment, but can be a positive experience of developing patience, experience and hope: “We must become the change we want to see.” (Mohandas Ghandi)

The conference chair, Bishop Dr. Aldred, drew attention to two key points from Parmi’s presentation:

- The need for face-to-face engagement with faith groups
- The need to go the extra mile in this engagement.

He also noted that disabled children are more likely to be abused than other children, as highlighted in the NSPCC Report of the National Working Group on Child Protection and Disability (2003).¹

¹ Morris, Jenny ed. National Working Group on Child Protection and Disability (2003) *It doesn't happen to disabled children: child protection and disabled children*. Report of the National Working Group on Child Protection and Disability. London, NSPCC.

Child abuse linked to accusations of “possession” and “witchcraft”

Eleanor Stobart, consultant
Heather Harvey, Amnesty International

Eleanor and Heather were commissioned by the DfES to research the subject of children accused of demon possession and witchcraft. The report on their findings, *Child abuse linked to accusations of “Possession” and “Witchcraft”* was published in 2006.²

Terms of reference

The research objectives were to:

- establish the scale of the problem
- identify risk factors
- identify good practice in faith organisations
- place the work in an international context.

Terminology

The researchers noted that a range of terms are used to describe these phenomena; there is no common language, and many terms reflect a particular cultural background. However, there is a consensus in accepting that:

- “possession” denotes an evil force that has entered a child
- “witch” is used to describe a child that uses this evil against others
- “exorcism” ranges from praying at a distance to “beating the devil” out of the child.

Many parents believe they are dealing with the devil rather than the child, and fear this evil. So they use burning, suffocation and leaving the child in baths, with treatments often escalating in intensity.

The data

The researchers found and reviewed a total of 93 cases from the following sources:

² This report, by Eleanor Stobart, can be downloaded from:
www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR750.pdf

- The Metropolitan Police (Met) Project Violet, set up to investigate cases of alleged ritual abuse, demon possession and abuse against children, had crime reports on 33 cases.
- A further 24 cases were identified from social care agencies, other police forces and schools, all of which were identifiable as separate cases.
- A further 36 cases were brought to the researchers' attention by non-governmental organisations. However, as names and dates of birth or other identifying data could not be traced, it was uncertain whether they were all different cases. They were therefore disregarded to avoid double-counting.

Another 19 possible cases were rejected as irrelevant, leaving 38 suitable cases to be analysed for the research. These involved 47 children, as five families had more than one child subjected to the abuse.

Case profiles

Age

The victims were relatively young: the oldest were aged 14. This could be because children beyond that age may have been sent abroad or even murdered, or they may have run away from home. It was noted that, coincidentally, 14 years is also the average age of entering into prostitution.

Region

The research was London-based and most children (three quarters) were from London.

Origin

There was a significant cluster from the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), but the researchers also found cases across other cultural groups. Significantly, half of the children were born in the UK, and researchers emphasised that it is not just a "foreign" problem.

Religion

In half of all cases a connection between carer and their church (16 cases) or mosque (3) was acknowledged as being influential in the case, although the religious institution concerned was not always involved in the actual abuse.

Family structure

Family structures tended to be complex. Children lived with mothers, fathers, aunts, uncles, siblings and half-siblings all in the same household, and it was difficult to establish whether the carers were related to the child or whether there was a private fostering arrangement.

Differentiating features

Many victims had a disability, even as slight as a stammer. Often a severe stressor or change in circumstances had led to the child being viewed as “different” in an attempt to rationalise this difference. In other cases, a terrible event would be arbitrarily linked with the arrival of the child, and the child then held responsible.

How cases were handled – an example

Generally it appeared that the problems were allowed to escalate until the children had to be removed from the family situation and taken into long-term care. For example, one social worker learnt about an eight-year-old girl who was being taken to various mosques for exorcism. The researcher found that the social worker dealing with the case did not know whether the girl spoke English, as she had in fact never met her. Three weeks later, when the researcher followed up on the case, it turned out that the social worker and her manager had agreed not to take the case any further, as it would be “too heavy-handed to intervene”. Clearly, action should have been taken.

Some children had been taken abroad and abandoned. For example, an eight-year-old rang her British primary school from Kinshasa Airport (Democratic Republic of the Congo). She had been left to her own devices, unable to speak the local language as she had lived in the UK since the age of two. However, when this was followed up, the Foreign Office concluded that she was “not a British citizen.”

We must learn lessons from these cases: otherwise each new case will repeat the mistakes of the past.

Bishop Aldred highlighted three aspects of the presentation:

- The phenomenon occurs across all faith communities.
- There is a lack of accurate record-keeping to enable rapid identification of such cases.
- We should all ask ourselves: “What can I do about this?”

A community example: supporting orthodox Jewish families in north-west London

Yair Cohn, head of parent support services, The Clubhouse

Yair Cohn provided a community example of best practice, based on the work of The Clubhouse, an organisation that works with Jewish Orthodox families in north-west London.

The Clubhouse project started in 1997, initially focusing on boys who were on the streets or had other behavioural or drug-related problems. Later, the Girls Action Project was set up for girls in similar circumstances.

The initiatives were welcomed in the community, though at first many parents concluded it was “not for my child” and chose not to get involved. Many would refrain from seeking help until problems had persisted for a long time. In response, the Jewish Parental Network (JPN) was established to provide talks and help develop parental skills, and the following themes emerged:

- the impact of the parents’ own experience of being parented
- the challenge of parenting a large family
- learning disabilities and other differences in children
- children’s decreased observance of religious rite
- financial difficulties
- bereavement.

Schools also became part of the Network, with five Orthodox schools providing support to around 25 secondary pupils through one-to-one mentoring. The clergy also became involved and the project now has 60 employees, supporting 700 children from 200 families.

Yair emphasised the importance of a multidisciplinary and holistic approach, supporting the family as a whole, and the need for spiritual safeguarding in an increasingly secular society. He stressed the fact that public organisations do not understand the concerns of Orthodox Jews, hence the success of community projects such as these, even without any advertising.

However, it is also important to adapt to changing perceptions, norms and practices, for instance in the interpretation of the bible: promoting “mutual respect” within families, rather than rigidly adhering to “the bible says: respect your parents!”

Confidentiality is also an issue: people can be concerned that they will lose face and their standing in their community. However, technology such as email can help bypass this.

Yair provided a few case examples to illustrate the range of work taken on by the project, from supporting the daughter of a single mother of five through her GCSE exams after a failed attempt to establish herself in Israel, to a rebellious 17-year-old girl whose problems appeared to be rooted in her parents' marital difficulties and subsequent divorce.

Question and answer session

Including BME disabled children (Parmi Dheensa)

Q: Do you have guidance for including children with disabilities in faith settings?

Include Me TOO has been working in a number of faith settings and is currently developing an Inter-Faith Strategy, focusing on the inclusion and equality of disabled children in faith settings to support community cohesion and to meet their religious and spiritual needs and those of their family members. It will be incorporating the practical steps already being highlighted through its work to break down attitudinal / practical barriers.

Q. Including parents in “what is a safe environment” is a good idea - what did they say?

It is a good idea and it is achievable. Involving BME parents and carers has been crucial, increasing access to and understanding of relevant information, creating real partnerships with service providers and links within their own communities; this has resulted in real dialogue. It is increasingly important to work with parents and carers in a safe environment, to create a mutual space and appreciation of safeguarding disabled children and securing the same outcomes for them. Parents and carers also provide valuable input and expertise to collectively help disabled children to be safe.

Accessing and engaging with BME parents and carers through faith communities has proved to be effective, particularly as many agencies are still failing to do so. One recommendation is for the Local Safeguarding Children Board to engage with local faith groups/community groups in order to build trust and understanding in this area of work.

Q. What issues have you identified in faith organisations?

Practical issues around resources and access: making a place of prayer accessible for instance, so that a disabled person can pray with others. When invited to events, it is important to address disability issues sensitively.

Research on child abuse linked to possession/ witchcraft (Eleanor Stobart and Heather Harvey)

Q: The recommendation regarding the central database – has this happened?

The Working Together Guidance has been issued but requires additional practical guidance, which should also be included in the LSCB guidance and training. There is also a need for community empowerment through user-friendly information and ownership of training by community groups, as well as guidance on how to engage male religious leaders.

Q: What happened regarding the parents and their beliefs?

Some were prosecuted and some sanctioned under the Mental Health Act. The researchers did not do long-term follow-up research on parents. There were 11 cases of concern regarding mental health related to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), schizophrenia and depression, which were very complex to unravel.

The Clubhouse presentation (Yair Cohn)

Q: Do you have a threshold on how you relate to social services departments?

The Clubhouse has child protection procedures and discusses with rabbis on how to proceed, and with the local borough, Barnet, on how to improve communication and trust. It also has its own social worker. The challenge is to be trusted by both community and social service staff, and finding the common goals.

Parmi Dheensa: Include Me TOO provides training and support to parents and Early Years workers who deal with children with demanding and complex needs, bringing in the dimension of religion, equality and diversity. They have no problem with statutory agencies.

Q. Is the Clubhouse model good for other communities?

The Clubhouse works with families rather than focusing on the religious aspect. It helps children to make sense of their choices and accept them rather than force them back. Once a child is accepted for him/herself, not just for conforming, they will often go back to the family and community.

Workshop panel discussion

The workshop panel discussion was chaired by Chris Cloke, head of child protection awareness and diversity at the NSPCC. The workshop facilitators presented a vignette of their work and briefly outlined the theme of their workshop. This was followed by a very brief discussion.

Lynda Ince: The Afrocentric paradigm - cultural knowledge and parenting

The aim of this workshop was to discuss family, parenting and networking in the context of the Afrocentric paradigm, a world view or model that emphasises the importance of African people in culture, philosophy and history, and marks a shift from the Eurocentric model that led to injustices and inadequacies in meeting the needs of Black Africans.

Aisha Khan: Supporting Community Development

This workshop aimed to help those who engage with or have partnerships with faith groups or community support organisations, to look at a diversity of communities, how to support community development, and to explore ways forward.

Emily Hodder-Williams: Participation – what works when involving children and young people

Young people from Restoring Lives, a charity that supports young people who are not in school or employment, designed this workshop and had been involved throughout the planning stages. Topics covered included bullying, gang culture, and religious factors, emphasising the children's rights perspective.

Sunil Puri: Achieving the goals of Every Child Matters in faith settings

This workshop was aimed at professionals who engage with faith groups, looking at ways of helping these to work safely and positively with children and young people and to meet the outcomes as set out in the Every Child Matters framework, which should hopefully result in more funding.

Abd Al-Rahman: The impact of parental drug and alcohol substance misuse on children

This workshop aimed to help faith communities look at the effect of parental drug abuse on their children, particularly where family members belong to two or more faith groups and where the intervention has to be tailored to the needs of the whole family.

Saleha Islam: NSPCC Asian Helpline

The NSPCC Asian Helpline was set up six years ago and is part of the NSPCC 24-hour helpline services. It offers multi-lingual and culturally sensitive services. Issues can arise when acting on concerns where faith communities are involved, and Saleha illustrated this with a case example where an anxious father had phoned in to report a suspected physical abuse case at a mosque involving his eight-year-old son. As the father chose to remain anonymous, no formal complaint could be made, but the information was passed on to social services. However, they had concerns regarding cultural misunderstandings and were reluctant to contact the mosque.

Young people's perspective

Young people from Restoring Lives³ (South London) led this session. It was based on the outcomes of "Have Your Say", an NSPCC consultation event for black and minority ethnic young people, which took place in August 2007.⁴

The young people read a series of statements and asked the delegates to state whether they agreed or disagreed. This was followed by a slide showing the young people's (YP) position on the statement.

"Religious Education should not be taught in schools."

Delegates: Most disagreed. People should respect all religions and make an informed choice.

YP: Religious workshops at school could help you learn about different cultures.

"Terrorism is a growing problem."

Delegates: Most agreed, though they also asked: "what does terrorism mean?"

YP: The impact of terrorism is discrimination, fear and separation. Young people want to believe in something. Religious organisations can help provide places to go for young people and to educate people about religion.

"Anti-social behaviour is a result of family breakdown."

Delegates: Most disagreed: anti-social behaviour can be a result of many things including family breakdown, but doesn't happen solely because of it.

YP: Family problems are caused by a variety of factors including money, weak relationships, alcohol, drugs and smoking, teenage pregnancy, exam results, clothing issues, issues around being gay, divorce and abuse.

³ A charity that helps young people who are not in education or employment, based in South London and Birmingham.

⁴ This event offered an opportunity for young people from different backgrounds and religious groups to explore issues around safety and their wellbeing. The report, *Have Your Say*, is available online from NSPCC inform at: www.nspcc.org.uk/Inform/research/Findings/haveyoursay_wda54762.html

“‘Stop and Search’ is based upon judgement or stereotypes of an individual.”

Delegates: Most agreed that stereotyping is significant, and that colour or other visible signs of ethnicity (eg, Muslim dress) are likely to form part of stereotypes.

YP: Violence, gun and knife crime are getting out of control because it is easy to buy guns, and some young people think it is the only way to protect themselves. Young people carry guns because they give them “street cred”. Religious and community groups can keep young people off the street by providing activities such as youth groups, which will in turn help to stop the violence.

“Young students do not trust teachers to sort out bullying within schools.”

Delegates: Agree. The issues are not being resolved in school. There needs to be more joined-up thinking.

YP: Children who are bullied want to be able to speak in confidence to someone who is trustworthy; to be safe from the bully; to get support until the problem is sorted out; to get honest and sincere advice; and someone to listen to them.

The final message from the young people was for all adults “to be role models for young people”.

Workshop 1 – The Afrocentric paradigm: cultural knowledge and parenting

Lynda Ince, regional network manager, Parenting UK

This workshop focused on African-centred theoretical concepts to explain the cultural traditions that underpin parenting. Afrocentricity is a world view or model that emphasizes the importance of African people in culture, philosophy and history, marking a shift away from the Eurocentric model.

The concept of Afrocentricity and parenting

Individuals do not parent alone and kinship networks are important factors. The role of the Church is acknowledged as a support organisation within the community.

Safe communities and safe parenting

We all have a role to play in creating safe communities. People working collectively are better able to protect children. The role of community elders in this respect should not be underestimated.

The emphasis should be on:

- interdependence – “working together”
- collective strategies – concept of the village or the community and collaboration
- spirituality – de-emphasising materialism
- promoting holistic thinking and spiritual development
- connectedness – oneness and unity.

The challenges are:

- to become conscious of the impact of all forms of oppression
- to build the capacity of the community to respond effectively to children and families
- to help to create safe communities
- to work with and within faith groups
- to involve grandparents and the circle of elders
- to adapt this paradigm for a modern society.

Professionals can:

- mobilise support systems
- understand the nature of the helping tradition and its relationship to a cultural tradition
- use the Afrocentric paradigm as a means of solving problems and building on strengths
- become culturally competent
- consider historical and contemporary contributions.

Recommendations

- Speak to staff regarding the importance of spirituality: “It is who I am.”
- Build on current strengths: self-esteem and mutual respect.
- Recognise the commonality of peoples’ struggles.
- Network with religious groups to challenge particular attitudes and behaviours related to “witchcraft” and “possession”.
- Provide positive role models.
- Organise family group meetings.
- Be creative about self-expression and ideas about being safe and unsafe and what that means.
- Draw on the tradition of helping.

Workshop 2 – Supporting faith groups in community development

Facilitator: Aisha Khan, community health development manager, Brent Primary Care Trust

This workshop explored examples of community development work with faith groups, showing different approaches. - Aisha has developed community forums as advisory groups and is involved in the Brent Refugee Forum, which has representatives of different refugee communities. This is working quite well.

The participants shared their experiences of working with faith groups to overcome barriers in community development and spoke about:

- the difficulties in working in partnership with small group communities
- the difficulties in finding faith organisations and developing networks
- carrying out child awareness work in streets and shopping centres as a way to get the work done
- offering training to the public who need help and helping to train professionals to find ways to empower young people
- working in mosques and madrassas to develop child policies (a pilot with two mosques which, if successful, will be rolled out)
- working with the Nigerian community in developing approaches to raising and protecting children in ways that are acceptable in the UK context.

Aisha stressed that it is important to meet half-way, working with what the community wants but also within the limits of what professionals are able to do.

The discussion on working with communities in addressing child abuse linked to witchcraft and spirit possession highlighted that:

- It is important to get someone to speak to the community from their own background, as they are more likely to be respected.
- It is important to have Ofsted standards in religious education organisations.
- Interfaith forums are there to support agencies.
- Trust needs to be earned through building relationships.

Recommendations

- Develop user-friendly child protection policies and procedures.
- Provide training for communities and services.
- Work with people and share agendas, priorities, ownership and resources.

Workshop 3 – Participation: what works when involving children and young people in black and minority ethnic faith settings?

Emily Hodder-Williams, NSPCC children and young people participation advisor, in collaboration with young people from Restoring Lives.

This workshop provided an opportunity to discuss the participation of black and minority ethnic children and young people in decision-making and started with an exercise in which delegates were asked to write their hopes and fears on yellow or pink cards. These were then read out and discussed.

Hopes:

- children are empowered through my wisdom/care
- more young people become leaders
- to make a positive difference
- to support and listen to young people
- to gain a deeper understanding.

Fears:

- to make no difference
- young person not wanting to engage
- young people's input not met by action
- not reaching young people.

From this exercise it was apparent that everyone has shared hopes and fears and wants to make a difference in young people's lives for the better.

The theoretical framework of children and young people's participation is underpinned by Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.⁵

⁵ Article 12 of the Convention states that: 1.States Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child. (2) For this purpose, the child shall in particular be provided the opportunity to be heard in any judicial and administrative proceedings affecting the child, either directly, or through a representative or an appropriate body, in a manner consistent with the procedural rules of national law.

In models of child participation, the term “participation” is the process of involving children and young people in decision making; “consultation” is the process of gathering and listening to their views; and the term “involvement” describes any form of engaging children and young people in activities.

There are various levels of participation, ranging from the superficial to being fully included, where children and young people’s advice and opinions are sought and acted upon, and they are involved in the planning at every stage. Participation is a process that ultimately leads to their empowerment.

Delegates were encouraged to think about some of the issues faced by children and young people, with a view to developing strategies and processes that ensure all young people are able to participate. They were prompted by role plays acted out by the young people from Restoring Lives.

Exercise 1: A role-play about bullying involving three girls, one of whom had converted to Islam and was now wearing a hijab. She perceived that the other two girls, previously her friends, had changed their attitude towards her as a result.

Participants’ suggested:

- Talk to the girl about how she feels, and about the reasons behind her decision to convert to ascertain what her new-found identity does for her. Does she understand what her decision means?
- Speak to the other girls about their reaction: do they feel confused or unsure about this girl? Are they indeed laughing at her, or is this a misunderstanding?
- Encourage the girl to talk about her experiences and decisions, and make clear that the “door is always open” and that support is available.

Exercise 2: This scenario involved a young man and woman attending a youth club. The older male made extreme sexual comments to the young woman, who felt uncomfortable and asked him to stop.

Participants suggested:

The youth group leader should be informed as soon as possible, and he/she should reiterate to club members the ground rules of the club without implicating anyone. The girl should be

asked about her choice as to the next steps to be taken. As she may be unsure, she should be presented with realistic options and their likely outcomes.

Exercise 3: This scenario involved two rival gangs. The situation had become increasingly violent and one of the gangs had just bought a gun to “protect themselves”.

Participants suggested:

In order to understand the behaviour of gangs, their history must be understood. This can be done through talking to gang members and ex-members to find out why they joined; what does being part of the gang give them? Once this is understood, an alternative can be provided, but this should be one that the members want rather than what others think suitable. For example, they may prefer something related to employment or practical training rather than educational opportunities; this should be decided in consultation with the young people in the area.

Conclusion

Children and young people should be encouraged to actively participate in society as individuals and in particular in decisions that affect their lives. New initiatives are more likely to be acceptable if children and young people are actively involved at every stage of the decision- making process, as it will be tailored to their needs and they will be given a degree of responsibility for their own choices.

Workshop 4 – Achieving the goals of Every Child Matters in faith settings

Sunil Puri, multi-agency safeguarding trainer, Camden Children, School and Families

This workshop aimed to identify positive ways of working with children and young people that will enable faith organisations to meet the government’s outcomes framework.

Participants included local authority designated officers for safeguarding, a Stop it Now⁶ coordinator, policy advisers in the safeguarding field for both statutory and voluntary organisations, an NSPCC Asian helpline representative, church advisers on safeguarding, practitioners in safeguarding teams, a community paediatrician and a few pastors, one of whom was a retired detective inspector from the Metropolitan Police Project Violet.

Sunil highlighted a few issues and questions to prompt the discussion. These included:

- Stressful activities can prompt abuse, eg, post-natal depression, exams etc.
- How can we share knowledge of body parts and appropriate behaviour?
- The effects of abuse on brain development in terms of language and emotional capacity (as revealed by MRI scans).
- Views on social service departments – some seem to do nothing, while others may intervene too heavily.
- The “super-nanny” approach in building up a relationship and then talking through why parents do what they do.
- Ninety per cent of paedophiles are not known by others as such.
- The development of male and female sexuality; men are often aware from an early age what will stimulate them sexually whereas women may change, based on patterns of emotional intimacy. The relevance of this is that if young men are aroused by accessing child abuse images, it is likely to remain a source of arousal throughout their lives.
- The differentiation between child “protection” and “safeguarding”; Sunil described this in terms of their relative emphasis in the 1989 Children Act (child protection) and the

⁶ A public information and awareness raising campaign regarding child sexual abuse. www.stopitnow.org.uk/

2004 Act (more emphasis on safeguarding, with a duty to protect, prevent and overcome impairment).

The five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes were considered, one of which is “to be healthy”:

- physically
- mentally
- sexually.

Sexual health was looked at in greater depth, noting the high rate of teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections.

How can faith organisations help to achieve better sexual health?

- Ask communities for their views.
- Ask what our organisations are doing to promote healthy sexual lifestyles.

The relationship between local authorities and faith organisations can be difficult where the local authority tries to initiate change from the outside, rather than engaging in dialogue and listening to what the organisation wants from them. For example, when approaching a Muslim organisation about their safeguarding practices, giving the Muslim organisation the opportunity to raise issues such as chronic overcrowding in local housing will help create a “win-win” situation.

Sunil drew attention to the fact that local authorities need to demonstrate their work against the five Every Child Matters outcomes and proposed that if faith organisations were required to do the same, they would get support from the local authority in carrying out their work.

The group then broke into smaller groups to discuss what faith organisations need to do in order to achieve this:

- listen to children
- communicate effectively with parents/carers
- present safeguarding issues from their faith teachings
- provide safe places
- be open and transparent

- have children and young people as advocates
- revise their policies and procedures
- raise awareness.

In summary, it was noted that faith organisations are not the problem but the solution. Sunil highlighted to the group that awareness leads to learning, which in turn leads to change in values, then to beliefs, and only then to dramatic changes in practice.

Workshop 5 – The impact of parental drug and alcohol substance misuse on children

Facilitator: Abd Al-Rahman, In-volve

This workshop aimed to explore parental substance misuse within the context of faith communities, and to look at the factors that are the same or different across the various communities.

This involved looking at the emotional, psychological, spiritual and physical aspects both from the drug user's perspective and that of other family members.

It is important to develop an understanding of:

- risks
- confidentiality
- “tight” community
- effects of alcohol or other drugs on childcare and the children
- treatment focus on the individual
- how faith can rescue and offer guidance
- how to approach faith leaders if you are against religion
- engaging younger imams in different ways.

NSPCC response

Dame Mary Marsh, NSPCC director and chief executive

This is an important day and feedback has been exceptional so far. It is also a first for NSPCC to host a seminar centred around this particular issue.

The young people are a powerful voice today, for they are the ones who are directly affected by the issues raised. Coming together like this we aim to encourage dialogue with such young people, identify best practice to see what reaches out to them and ask ourselves what helps people to come together.

Seeing everyone here today, your presence is indicative of the commitment we all have towards young people and for the responsibility we take for safeguarding children.

What can we all do?

Those in faith groups have an extra responsibility, for they have a level of respect and acceptance in communities and therefore it is important to engage faith groups to enable us to take care of children effectively. Faith groups are also important pillars, for they provide vital services to the communities in which they are based and which they represent.

What do we do at the NSPCC?

We aim to achieve direct community engagement with all groups. The NSPCC's Humsaath project in Bradford and Tamarind House in Manchester are examples of this. The NSPCC hopes that other organisations can use this as a template to engage.

In addition to these, advisory and outreach services are offered via our monthly *Your Family* publication, the NSPCC Helpline, representatives on LSCBs and the NSPCC Safe Communities initiative.

It is critical we all work together to safeguard children. Networking is integral to what we do, and the NSPCC seeks to continually learn about the communities we wish to engage with.

This conference is titled "Building on Strengths": it is about utilising the collective support and good work we have all achieved to move the safeguarding agenda forward together.

Plenary session

Norbert Marjolin, NSPCC project manager, summarised the key presentations.

Bishop Joe Aldred reminded delegates of the importance of working together and being mindful of the different experiences and backgrounds of children living in the UK.

BME disabled children and faith communities

- More needs to be done to ensure that the needs of deaf and disabled children in BME communities are addressed.
- Parents in all faith groups have a positive and significant role to play.
- We all need to identify barriers that deaf and disabled children face, making sure that we play an active role in removing such barriers.
- We have more in common and we share similar values, hence there is a further need for multi-faith approaches to keep children safe.
- We need to increase the distribution of safeguarding information and ensure it reaches parents and community businesses.
- We must produce a multi-/inter-faith strategy for tackling abuse/child cruelty across the UK.
- We must always try to go the extra mile.

Research on child abuse linked to witchcraft and possession

- Little research has been done in the area of child abuse linked to spirit possession and witchcraft.
- There is a need for a common language that everybody understands and signs up to.
- We cannot underestimate the gravity of this type of abuse.
- Barriers: lack of systemic evidence, poor recording, lack of cultural knowledge of families involved in this type of abuse.
- Positive: links with schools and individual families.
- The findings show that:
 - A significant number of children with a difference/disability were more vulnerable to this form of abuse.
 - Over half of the children in identified cases were UK born.
 - It occurs across all cultural/religious groups.
 - No child was over the age of 14.

- Family stress and/or changes in family circumstances did put children at a higher risk of abuse.
- Recommendations from the research:
 - More systemic record keeping is needed to capture this type of abuse.
 - There is a need to use or make better use of current human rights laws.

The Clubhouse – a community example

- Holistic approach to safeguarding children and young people is effective.
- Key community involvement is essential.
- Offer guidance and services, but also access to spirituality.
- Work with parents.
- Joined up working with schools/other statutory services.
- Create a safe space for children/parents.
- Provide individual and family therapy.

Other points

- The challenges of faith in a secular society

Panel discussion

- The role of faith groups in safeguarding children is underdeveloped. We must find ways to maximise this potential.
- We must encourage participation at every level of our faith organisations.
- Training must be made more accessible across the board.
- We must take a stand against knife and gun crime in our communities.
- There needs to be more joined-up thinking around bullying.
- We must provide more safe spaces for children.
- We need more role models for children and young people.
- We must all be someone to turn to for children.
- We must learn to listen to children better.

Appendix 1 – Conference programme

Building on strengths

Protecting and promoting the welfare of children and young people in faith-based settings

9.30	Registration, tea and coffee
10.00	Welcome and Health & Safety Shirley Maginley, NSPCC
	Chair's Introduction and Opening Remarks Dr Joe Aldred, Churches Together in England
10.15	Safeguarding Black and minority ethnic disabled children in faith settings Parmi Dheensa, executive director, Include Me TOO
10.30	Presentation of research: Child Abuse Linked to Accusations of "Possession" and "Witchcraft" Eleanor Stobart, independent researcher Heather Harvey, Amnesty International
11.00	A community example Yair Cohn, The Clubhouse (Jewish family support)
11.15	Break
11.30	Table top discussion
11.45	Questions & Answer session
12.05	Workshop panel discussion Panel chair - Christopher Cloke, head of child protection awareness and diversity, NSPCC
12.45	Young people's perspective
1.00	Lunch and networking - Visit Information stalls
1.55	Workshops
3.15	Break
3.25	NSPCC's response to working together to safeguard children in faith communities Dame Mary Marsh, NSPCC director and chief executive
3.40	Plenary session
3:50	Evaluation and close

Appendix 2 – Conference contributors

Welcome: Shirley Maginley, NSPCC

Conference chair: Bishop Dr Joe Aldred, secretary of minority ethnic Christian affairs, Churches Together in England

Speakers: Parmi Dheensa, executive director, Include Me TOO
Eleanor Stobart, consultant
Heather Harvey, Amnesty International
Yair Cohn, The Clubhouse (Jewish family support)

Workshop Panel discussion:
Chris Cloke, NSPCC

Young people's perspective:
Young people from Restoring Lives

Workshop facilitators:

Workshop 1: Lynda Ince, regional network manager, Parenting UK
Workshop 2: Aisha Khan, community health development manager, Brent Primary Care Trust
Workshop 3: Emily Hodder-Williams, NSPCC and young people from Restoring Lives
Workshop 4: Sunil Puri, multi-agency safeguarding trainer, Camden Children, Schools and Families
Workshop 5: Abd Al-Rahman, In-volve

Response from NSPCC:
Dame Mary Marsh, NSPCC director and chief executive

Plenary: Norbert Marjolin, NSPCC

Appendix 3 – Conference evaluation

Approximately 65 delegates attended this conference, and 43 completed and returned their evaluation forms.

Summary

Overall, very positive feedback was received with the majority of delegates rating all aspects of the conference very highly. The workshop themes were very varied and proved popular among the delegates, while the participation of young people was a particular highlight for many. The speakers provided insight into areas where there was little awareness before, which demonstrates how much learning is still needed on safeguarding black and minority children in faith communities.

Selected quotes from delegates' evaluation forms

“Eleanor/Heather’s presentation was powerful, child-centred and informative. It is a shame they had such little time.”

“Workshop with young people was inspiring.”

“The whole day raised important and wide issues which has left me with a lot of food for thought.”

“A most enjoyable day that has given me an enormous amount of information. In addition to strengths in the belief that together we can make a difference in making children safe.”

“Cross-section of people, the best I’ve ever encountered in the UK.”

“I feel like Pandora’s box has been opened and not much seems to be happening to address these issues.”

Appendix 4 – Speakers' biographies

Bishop Dr JD Aldred

Executive director for minority ethnic Christian affairs, Churches Together in England

Joe Aldred is a bishop in the Church of God of Prophecy. He is executive director for minority ethnic Christian affairs, Churches Together in England, and a radio presenter on BBC WM. He is the author and editor of several publications, the latest being *Respect: Understanding Caribbean British Christianity*. He has an earned PhD in theology from Sheffield University. Joe is associated with a number of organisations, including the Council of Black-led Churches, Birmingham and Solihull Mental Health Trust, the University of Central England, the Faith Communities Consultative Council, and the National Black Church Leaders Forum. He is a regular contributor to current and religious affairs in the press and media. Born in Jamaica, he came to England as a teenager and is married to Novelette who is a psychotherapist. Together they have three daughters: Marsha, Genelle and Alethea and a son-in-law, Andrew. Joe is a long-suffering, fanatical supporter of West Indies cricket.

Yair Cohn

Head of parent support services, The Clubhouse

Yair Cohn is a UKCP registered systemic and family psychotherapist. Three years ago he helped establish Parent Support Services (PSS) within the Clubhouse, an organisation that works with Jewish-Orthodox families in north-west London. Since its inception, Mr Cohn manages the service and also offers direct work with families. Since September 2007 he has joined a Barnet Child and Adolescent Mental Health service team to get an insight into their multi-disciplinary approach of working with families and to learn how such a model could be culturally adapted to suit a Jewish context.

Prior to that, he worked as a research psychologist in the health psychology service of Guy's and St Thomas' NHS Foundation Trust. In this position he conducted research studies among healthcare professionals who care for patients from black and ethnic minority groups suffering from either sickle cell disease or diabetes. In the role of programme coordinator, he also helped develop and facilitate cultural awareness and communication skills courses for healthcare professionals who care for patients with either sickle cell disease or cancer.

His special clinical and research interest lies in the challenges of both inter- and intra-cultural work with families. He is married with two children.

Parmi Dheensa
Executive director, Include Me TOO

Parmi Dheensa is the executive director of Include Me TOO (IM2). Include Me TOO is a national organisation championing the rights of all disabled children and their families, with a key focus on BME and other marginalised communities, promoting inclusion and anti-discrimination.

Parmi has over 10 years experience of working in the area of combating inequalities experienced by BME communities and other marginalised communities. She has worked with voluntary, community, statutory, private and cooperative sectors, locally, regionally and nationally. During this time she has developed and implemented several BME-specialist community consultations and projects, including early-years and children and families provisions, parents and carers networks, disabled children and young people's participation, community mental health, older people's day care provision and women's support and health awareness initiatives. Parmi has also delivered training, lectures, and consultancy with regard to policies and practices around diversity, inclusion and anti-discriminatory service development and delivery.

She is a South Asian parent and has two children, one of whom has severe learning disabilities and additional needs. Parmi dedicates her time to support BME disabled children and their families, to be champions through many approaches such as peer mentoring support, increased awareness and information, sharing their experiences and issues to influence positive changes for a better quality of family life.

Eleanor Stobart
Consultant

Eleanor spent 17 years working in the health service. She trained as a nurse at the Middlesex and University College Hospitals and has also worked at Kings College Hospital. Eleanor specialised in tropical medicine, infectious diseases and HIV, and held senior ward sister posts at both St George's Hospital and St Mary's Hospital.

After moving to West Yorkshire, Eleanor worked at Leeds Teaching Hospitals Trust until 1999, when she left to take a full-time MBA at Bradford University Management Centre.

Since 2000 Eleanor has worked as an independent consultant on various projects for government departments and large organisations. Eleanor has worked with the Foreign & Commonwealth Office to produce good practice guidance for police, social care services, and education and health professionals who deal with cases of forced marriage. The Home Office Police Standards Unit and the Association of Chief Police Officers commissioned her to produce a DNA good practice guide. She has undertaken research for the Department for Education on child abuse linked to accusations “of possession”. Eleanor has also undertaken work with the British Medical Journal Publishing Group, the National Centre for Policing Excellence, the Immigration Service, West Yorkshire Police and the National School of Government.

Appendix 5 – Partner organisations

Camden Children, School and Families

Crowndale Centre, Unit 617, 218 Eversholt Street, London NW1 1BD

Tel: 020 7974 2806

The Children, Schools and Families Directorate is made up of most of the services in Camden Council that were in the old education department, children's social services and the play service.

Churches' Network for Non-violence

6 Sylvia Ave, Hatch End, Middlesex HA5 4QE,

Tel: 020 8428 3275

Email: info@churchesfornon-violence.org / www.churchesfornon-violence.org

The Churches' Network for Non-violence (CNNV) supports the aim of the Children Are Unbeatable! Alliance to give children the same protection from violence in the home as other family members.

Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO)

Suite 405, Highland House, 165 The Broadway, Wimbledon SW19 1NE

Tel: 0208 544 8037 / Email: sikhmessenger@aol.com / www.nsouk.co.uk

The Network of Sikh Organisations (NSO) links more than 90 UK gurdwaras and other UK Sikh organisations in active cooperation to enhance the image and understanding of Sikhism in the UK.

NHSTPCT Wembley Centre for Health & Care

116 Chaplin Road, Wembley HA0 4UZ,

Tel: 020 8795 6219

Brent PCT aims to deliver a better and more responsive health service and improve the health of local people.

Norwood - Kennedy Leigh Children and Family Centre

Edgeworth Close, Hendon, London NW4 4HU

Tel: 020 8457 4476 / www.norwood.org.uk/index.htm

The Kennedy Leigh Children & Family Centre is a child-focused centre housing the Pears Wing for Children, Norwood's first ever centre dedicated to children. Many of its support groups focus on the relationship between parents and their children.

Parenting UK

Unit 431 Highgate Studios, 53-79 Highgate Road, London NW5 1TL

Tel: 020 7284 8370 / www.parentinguk.org

Parenting UK, formed in 1995, is a membership organisation for those who offer parenting services, promoting quality provision in the field.

Redeemed Church of God

112, Brent Terrace, Brent Cross, London, NW2 1LT

Tel: 020 8438 8285, email: info@jesushouse.org.uk

The Redeemed Christian Church of God is a Nigeria-based Pentecostal Holiness ministry.

Appendix 6 – Delegate list

First name	Surname	Job title	Organisation
Malek	Ahmed	Language Co-worker	Oldham Social Services
Debbie	Beadle	Community Trainer	ECPAT
Paul	Brown	Corporate and Strategy Info Officer	CAFCASS
Siobhan	Burns	LSCB Manager	Local Safeguarding Children Board
Kim	Dickinson	OSCB/NSPCC Inter-agency Training Co-ordinator	NSPCC
Asha-Kin	Duale	Community Partnership	Voluntary Action Camden
Graham	Falgate	Derby City Local Authority	Middleton House
Deborah	Goulden	Social Worker	Norwood
Oumou	Gueye	Family Support Officer	Africans Unite Against Child Abuse
Colette	Horton	Social Worker	Leicester City Council
David	Howe	Child Protection Co-ordinator	Milton Keynes Council
Mumtaz	Kadodia	BME Development Worker	Gloucestershire Domestic Violence Support and Advocacy Project
Amina	Kathrada	Community Support Worker	Glos County Council
Sigil	Khwaja	Cultural Link Worker	Rainbows Childrens Hospice
Aneeta	Kulasegaran	Child Development Adviser	TEARFUND
Angela	Mansell	CSP Level 3	NSPCC
Sarb	Masih	Development Officer	Barnardos
Jackie	McCaig	National Co-ordinator	Bishop Conference of Scotland
Colette	Morris	Local Authority Designated Officer for Allegations	Oldham MBC
Karen	Newham	Development Officer NSCB	Nottinhamshire Safeguarding Children Board
Anisha	Panchbhaya	Administrator	Surestart Highfields
Lesley	Powell	LSCB Training Coordinator	Oldham Metropolitan Borough
Mandy	Pride	Community Development Officer	Nottingham City Council
Bob	Pull	Communities Consultant	CCPAS
Rama	Ramakrishnan	Children's Services Manager	NSPCC
Rabia	Raza	Policy Officer	Leicester City Council
Bijal	Ruparelia	Traineeship Manager	NSPCC
Jill	Sandham	Diocesan Safeguarding & Child Protection Adviser	Diocese of Southwark
Suki	Shergill	Community Development Officer	Nottingham City Council
Tess	Tackett	LSCB Training Coordinator	Blackpool LSCB
Shashi	Verma	Child Protection Manager	Birmingham City Council

Afua	Viana	National Advocacy Officer	Africans Unite Against Child Abuse
Claire	Wesley	Bishop's Adviser for Children's Ministry	Diocese of Birmingham
Annette	Williams	CSP	NSPCC
Joe	Wilson	Senior Project Worker	Family Intensive Project
Justin	Simon	Independent Consultant	Child Centred Consultancy
Eileen	Mignott	Co-ordinator	Black-led Churches Together in Child Protection
Penny	Sherrington		Great Ormond Street Hospital for Children
Elizabeth	Norris	Deputy Head of Service - Safeguarding	Wolverhampton City Council
Kusam	Bali	Safeguarding Review Manager	Wolverhampton City Council
Hussain	Lambat	Project Co-ordinator	Build (Community development)
Ghayasuddin	Siddiqui		The Muslim Parliament
Alan	Hassall	Children's Services Practitioner	NSPCC
Yemi	Fagborun	CEO	Bradford Women In Safe Hands
Georgina	McMurray	Children's Services Practitioner	NSPCC
Lesley	Davis	Social Worker	Hounslow Welcare
Louise	Ali	Team Leader	Hounslow Welcare
Shakeel	Hafez	Supplementary Schools Coordinator	Kirklees Council
Mary	McCauley	RCCG UK Teenagers National Co-ordinator	The Redeemed Christian Church of God Central Office
Wale	Ogunkeyede	Volunteer	Gods Vineyard Ministries
Shelagh	Laslett-O'brien	Centre Manager	NCH

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The National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children (NSPCC) has a vision – a society where all children are loved, valued and able to fulfil their potential.

Our mission is to end cruelty to children.

The NSPCC is the UK's leading charity specialising in child protection and the prevention of cruelty to children. For over 100 years it has been protecting children from cruelty and is the only children's charity with statutory powers, enabling it to act to safeguard children at risk.

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