

# STATUTORY INQUIRY INTO THE DEATH OF VICTORIA CLIMBIE

## STATEMENT OF DAVID FREDERICK PEARSON Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service



- 1.1 I, David Frederick Pearson, make this Statement on behalf of the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service ("CCPAS") as follows:
- 1.2 I am the Director of the Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service. I also act as a freelance consultant on child care issues and between 1986 and the present time have served as a Children's Guardian (formerly Guardian -ad-Litem). I have represented the Guardian service on an Area Child Protection Committee. I have over 30 years' experience in social work and social work management and specialised in child care matters for the whole of that time. Between 1979 and 1987 I was employed by the London Borough of Lambeth as Area Social Services Manager in Central Brixton. I am the author of numerous articles and publications on issues relating to child protection policy and practice.
- 1.3 **CCPAS originally registered as an interested party in relation to phase 2 of the Inquiry. The Inquiry has since decided that there will be no interested parties and have planned a series of seminars which we welcome. However, given the part played by churches in events preceding the death of Victoria Climbie, and the evidence given by church leaders to phase 1 of the Inquiry, we would ask that members of the Inquiry consider our comments generally on the role of the church in addition to the published questions. We feel this is particularly important as we are not aware of any other organisation who will be commenting in detail on these issues. Apart from this we have comments to make on the five seminar topics which are contained in Appendix 4 attached to this Statement.**
- 2.1 **Churches' Child Protection Advisory Service.** The mission of CCPAS is to help churches, organisations and families create a safe environment for children without fear of any kind of abuse and appropriately respond to the needs of individuals who may have been abused. In this respect the work of CCPAS is unique, supporting churches across denominations throughout the UK. On a limited basis we also provide direct help, guidance, support and counselling to individuals,

including children, affected by abuse. We are an independent charity supported in the main by voluntary donations, with assistance of core funding from the Department of Health and grants from charitable trusts etc.

2.2 CCPAS is the working name of PCCA Christian Child Care and is governed by a Council of Management consisting of individuals with a background in the church, management and finance, local authority child care and counselling. Almost a half of our Council of Management Members are from ethnic minorities and include the Youth Director of the largest black majority church denomination in Britain. A Reference Council has an advisory role. Members include national church leaders, the Chief Executive of the Children's Society, a former Deputy Director of Social Services and Health and Legal specialists.

2.3 Although not a large organisation, one of our strengths is the credibility we have both professionally and in the church/voluntary sector. As indicated, I also undertake freelance work on child protection and related issues. Our workers (paid and freelance) have senior management experience in child protection (eg two ex-ACPC Chairs, a CP Co-ordinator, and at senior level within the NSPCC) and work as a Children's Guardian. Others have extensive previous local authority and counselling experience.

3.1 **CCPAS services.** CCPAS has been providing child protection advice and support to churches, counselling and children's organisations etc since 1983. We seek to do this in relation to:

3.1.1. **Policies and practice.** Helping churches and organisations prepare and implement child protection policies and ensuring these are regularly reviewed and updated. Over the years we have pioneered the development of child protection policies in churches and other organisations and the principles developed have been adopted by many denominations and groups. This is true in a general sense and also in specific areas. For example, CCPAS pioneered a framework for working with known offenders in churches using contracts with individuals, etc which has since been adopted by the Anglican and Methodist churches nationally and by many others, as well as specialist agencies such as the Faithfull Foundation when working with churches in relation to offenders following a treatment programme. "Working Together to Safeguard Children", published by

government departments in 1999 states that churches (amongst other organisations) should have clear written procedures in place (paragraph 6.13). Churches are also expected by their insurance companies to have policies. The Charity Commission also require churches and other organisations working with children to have a written child protection policy in place before they will register a new charity. This requirement has resulted in many new churches (and other organisations) requesting our assistance. Our child protection manual, *Guidance to Churches* (recommended in the government publication "Working Together to Safeguard Children"), contains model policies and forms which can be adapted by local churches. I believe the hquiry may have a copy of *Guidance to Churches*. CCPAS would be happy to supply further copies if required. Some 31,000 copies of this manual have been sold or otherwise distributed in the last three years. We also provide a free consultation service to help churches prepare policies based on our own model or otherwise. Over the years several thousand churches have registered such policies with us. We provide an updating service to the manual, providing details of changes to legislation, new government guidance, CCPAS recommended practice etc.

3.1.2 **Helpline.** For some years we have provided a helpline (with an out of office hours service) for organisations and individuals. This operates on an 0845 national lo-call rate number. The helpline is advertised on the DoH website and published in advertisement form in church magazines and periodicals from time to time. These calls and others received via e-mail, through the post and personal contact, amounted to more than 6,000 enquiries in 2001. The amount of work in relation to each will have ranged from the giving of straightforward information to contact over many weeks and months.

3.1.3 **Training events.** Over the last ten years we have run more than a thousand child protection training and other events across the UK. These continue at a rate of about a hundred every year. A typical programme (attached as Appendix 1) includes such aspects as understanding the nature of child abuse, signs and symptoms, who to contact when there are concerns, how to respond to children, parents and alleged perpetrators, as well as aspects in developing a safe church environment, including the

preparation of child protection policies and procedures for appointing and supervising leaders, and safe practice issues. We have provided these programmes for Anglican and Catholic dioceses, Baptist Associations, Methodist, United Reformed, Pentecostal churches, other denominations, and independent churches of all descriptions.

3.1.4 **In-house training.** In addition to face-to-face training, we have developed a video training workpack and other resources which can be used by churches and organisations on an *in-house* basis. This material has been produced with generous assistance from the Department of Health. The workpack enables a church or organisation to provide a three-part training course to leaders and children's workers "in-house" and comes with an updating service and unlimited telephone support. We can also, on request, provide a CCPAS presenter to help churches use this training for the first time. The advantage of the video workpack training material is that this basic child protection course can be used over and over again as and when new workers are recruited. We have also developed a distance learning pack based on this material which is designed for individual study where preparation in a group is not possible. This material is used in relation to major events which involve recruiting workers from a distance for short periods of time and for other workers in isolated communities. See Appendix 2.

3.1.5 **Other services.** We provide counselling for leaders, children and adults before, during and after investigations as appropriate and have conducted management enquiries/reviews etc at the request of organisations following particular incidents of abuse. We also offer advice and support to denominational/organisational child protection advisors and to Social Services/Police investigating issues in religious communities and other groups.

- 3.2 **Current Priorities.** An important objective over the last couple of years has been to strengthen our links with black majority churches and other ethnic minority groups to ensure a greater take-up of our services. We have seen a significant increase in the number of black majority churches seeking our help and support, both in terms of developing child protection policies, training and help in regard to specific concerns. Another target group has been churches where doctrinal and other issues would appear to conflict with good child protection.
- 3.3 Over the years we have become aware of the overwhelming need for simple guidelines which are readily available to all working with children. As a result we produce laminated cards, comprising six panels, folding to credit card size, to conveniently fit wallets/pockets/handbags. The guides contain essential child protection information and details of helpline numbers, ie our own, NSPCC and ChildLine with a writing surface for recording new telephone numbers etc. These cards have been immensely popular with churches. In 2001 we distributed 35,000 copies. We have also been able to produce customised versions for particular denominations or groups and they have been used for major national Christian events. See Appendix 6 for examples of our general guide and one produced for a denomination.
- 4.1 **Victoria Climbié.** This evidence is, of course, submitted in relation to Phase 2 of the Inquiry. Our knowledge of the matters related to Phase 1 of the Inquiry's Terms of Reference is restricted to information gleaned from the Inquiry's website or from the press. So far as I am aware, we had not had any contact with the churches involved with Victoria Climbié or her carers prior to the events in question. However, on 14 August 2001 Louise Johnson of the Universal church of the Kingdom of God purchased a copy of our video workpack and we used this opportunity to offer our services to the church generally but this was not taken up. Contrary to the impression which may have been given by Mr Lima in his evidence this agency was not directly involved in the training though this was offered. The pack is designed for use by churches with or without the involvement of an experienced child protection trainer. More recently (17 January 2002) I wrote to the church reiterating our availability to offer help, training and advice in all matters related to child protection but to date we have not received any response.
- 4.2 Without wishing to be overly critical of the particular churches which had some contact with Victoria and her carers, CCPAS would like to make a number of

observations about child protection practice in this case. It should be acknowledged by way of mitigation that Victoria and her carers had only limited contact with the churches concerned. The churches had, albeit in a misguided way, attempted to show pastoral care to a very disturbed and frightened little girl. Despite all the criticisms that may be directed against them, the Christian people in question at least made some connection with Victoria and her aunt. They got closer to Victoria than all the official child protection agencies and this makes their failure all the more tragic.

- 4.3 The primary failure in relation to child protection would appear to be that church leaders, having observed on Victoria obvious bruising and signs of neglect, failed to make a referral to the statutory authorities. Associated with this is the fact that, latterly, when Victoria was clearly seriously unwell, church leaders relied on Marie Therese's partner, Carl Manning, to take Victoria to hospital.
- 4.4 The churches showed a lamentable lack of awareness of the fact that Victoria's disturbed behaviour might be indicative of abuse. A significant reason for this lack of alertness to child protection issues may be that the church leaders bought in, uncritically, to the notion that Victoria was demonized and this blinded them to the abuse. Although it seems that Victoria herself believed that she was "evil" and "possessed" this should have been seen as a childish response to sustained emotional and psychological cruelty. By accepting, without question, this interpretation of Victoria's evident disturbance the church effectively colluded with the abuse. To categorize a severely disturbed child as "possessed by the Devil" is an extreme example of blaming the victim.
- 4.5 A further failure demonstrated in this case was the inappropriate and unsafe way that church leaders responded to Marie There's allegations that Victoria was being sexually abused by Carl Manning. Irrespective of the reliability or otherwise of Marie Therese's testimony, serious allegations were being made which needed to be properly and thoroughly investigated. To simply assume that these allegations were fabricated, especially in the light of Victoria's presentation, was highly dangerous practice.
- 4.6 Evidence given by church representatives at the Inquiry indicate that the culture within the churches concerned was not one that was particularly child-centred. One pastor talks about Victoria being sent out of the main service to a children's

group where the children were encouraged to do drawing and sit quietly. Marie Therese was offered help and advice by the church workers but little was available to Victoria. Church leaders took on trust what was said by Marie Therese about Victoria's problems whereas nobody paid much attention to what Victoria was doing or saying. In fact, nobody really listened to Victoria throughout.

- 4.7 The failures outlined above and reported in more detail in Part One of the Inquiry are perhaps not surprising given the fact that the church to which Marie Therese took Victoria latterly had no child protection policy. The church leaders moreover had not received any child protection training as part of their qualifying training or later in their ministries. There were no written procedures or guidance available for children's workers in the church and no formal arrangements for supervision and support for these front line workers. The denomination does not appear to have been supportive to the particular church caught up in these tragic events and it is not clear whether those who gave evidence to the Inquiry have had the opportunity to work through, in a supported way, the painful issues raised by this case. Prior to this child protection does not appear to have even registered on the church's agenda and, as such, the church was woefully unprepared to deal with a pastoral problem of such magnitude and complexity.
- 4.8 There are immense difficulties in generalizing from this one case to child protection practice in all the churches across the United Kingdom as a whole. Whereas it is undeniable that there are churches and Christian groups which continue to be very lax with regard to safeguarding children, there are, on the other hand, many churches with high standards of policy and practice. At CCPAS we are in contact with churches from all denominations and of all shades of theological opinion who are conscientiously addressing these issues and who are struggling to deal with child protection within the church in a rigorous but sensitive and child-centred way.
- 4.9 The voluntary sector is characterized by diversity and this is particularly true within churches. There is a lack of information about what local churches are doing in relation to child protection and systems of accountability and monitoring, where they exist, are varied in the extreme. It is probably fair to say that the larger traditional denominations tend to have more highly developed policy and procedural guidance than do other groupings, especially independent groups who may be unknown to the statutory agencies. However, having a policy in itself isn't necessarily enough, it is the implementation of the policy at the local level which is

of the greatest significance in protecting children from harm. At CCPAS we strongly encourage local churches to both adopt their own policy (usually based on denominational guidelines) and keep it under constant review. We also urge churches to integrate child protection with all their activities and to offer training and support to those directly involved with children in church. At the end of the day it is attitude and awareness which is as important as policy and procedure.

- 4.10 In the light of evidence to the Inquiry regarding the lack of child protection training in preparation for Christian ministry, CCPAS commissioned a survey of Bible and theological colleges with a view to discovering whether or not this was the general picture. I wrote to Principals of ninety-nine colleges providing full-time training for a year or more. The Principals were made aware that I intended to use the results of the survey in a Statement to the Inquiry. To date responses have been received from two thirds of the colleges surveyed. However, the response rate varied; only 33% of independent and Pentecostal colleges as compared to an average of 63%. This was in spite of sending out reminders to all those who had not replied and the implication that a no reply was likely to be regarded as a nil return for the purpose of this exercise. However, the lack of response could be that the theological colleges have no interest in child protection and/or cannot see the need for introducing such policies. Others may no longer be operating and within the time constraints of the survey it has not been possible to check further on 'no replies'.
- 4.11 Only 50% of the colleges who responded to the questionnaire provide any form of child protection training (32% of all those surveyed). In some cases where colleges reported providing some training, it was apparent that selective information had been provided, ie relating to courses where child protection issues are taught and not listing those where the subject is not addressed. There was great variation in the time spent on training, ranging from ten minutes to twenty hours over courses of between one and three years. An analysis of the responses suggests there is an apparent lack of training/awareness among independent, interdenominational, pentecostal and Roman Catholic colleges in particular.
- 4.12 In the main, college lecturers are responsible for child protection training; it is not clear what skills they have in this area. About a quarter of the colleges who responded to the survey had someone specifically responsible for child protection issues. It would seem that more than half of the colleges had no plans to use the

new Criminal Records Bureau disclosure service available from April 2002, though many asked for additional information on this from CCPAS.

- 4.13 Students selected for training will in many cases be placed in churches to gain practical experience and eventually be appointed as ministers or childrens workers. It is clear from the survey and anecdotal feedback over time from ministers, childrens workers and students that child protection training is seriously neglected on the vast majority of training courses. On the positive side, the questionnaire promoted a great deal of interest from colleges, with some being very open about their weaknesses in a lack of appropriate training and policies. CCPAS propose sharing results of the survey with colleges and offering help and support in addressing issues raised.
- 4.14 I am aware from evidence given to the Inquiry that Mrs Mensah, one of the Pastors, received training at Spurgeon's College in South Norwood. The Certificate in Pastoral Studies is a part-time course. Spurgeon's College did not give any information about this course in their response to our survey, possibly because it is a part-time course. Mr Orone, another Pastor, stated that he undertook his theological training at Kensington Temple. Kensington Temple is a large church (reputed to be the largest in London). This training course was not listed as a full-time course for more than a year and was not therefore amongst those surveyed.
- 5.1 **CCPAS views and recommendations.** CCPAS are of the opinion that there is a legal and procedural framework, spelt out in successive Government guidance, which, if properly resourced and implemented, has the potential to prevent a large proportion of child abuse and neglect. The sad fact that not all child abuse is preventable should not deter us from making every effort to safeguard children from harm and to promote their welfare. So far as Christian churches are concerned their role and responsibility in relation to child protection is a supportive one. They occupy an intermediate position between the statutory authorities and the individual citizen and their responsibility is primarily to pass on any child protection concerns they may have to the appropriate investigating authorities. They should consider themselves to be part of the local child protection network and should develop close links with the relevant statutory authorities.

5.2 The role and responsibilities of Christian churches in child protection are restated below:

5.2.1 **Working Together to Safeguard Children.**

- Churches need to work together with statutory agencies in their locality in order to ensure that children are kept safe from harm
- Churches should be considered to be part of the child protection network and therefore, as voluntary agencies having contact with children, they fall within the remit of Area Child Protection Committees for communication and consultation on policies and procedures
- Churches should be able to access ACPC training at an appropriate level in the same way as other voluntary agencies within the locality

5.2.2 **Children at Church.**

- Individual Christian churches should adopt a child protection policy in line with Government guidance: Safe from Harm 1993 and Working Together 1999
- Churches should ensure that all of their members who have responsibilities (paid or voluntary) for working with children and young people are familiar with the policy and have opportunity for training in child protection

5.2.3. **Training Christian Ministers.**

- All those who are involved in any form of ministry which brings them into contact with children should be trained in child protection as part of their initial and updating training

5.3 These major principles of the churches' role in child protection are now well accepted. The challenge for churches is to implement them at the local level. This will involve not only having sound child protection policies and procedures in place but also having workers and volunteers who are competent in carrying them out.

This Inquiry offers the opportunity to underline the importance of churches taking child protection seriously.

DAVID PEARSON – 6<sup>th</sup> February 2002

**Appendices:**

1. **CCPAS sample Programme “Facing the Unthinkable” seminar**
2. **Sample video workpack training programme**
3. **CCPAS workers’ pocket guides**
4. **CCPAS Response to issues raised in seminar topics**