

AFRUCA 2001 – 2004 – THREE YEARS OF CAMPAIGNING AGAINST CHILD ABUSE

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AFRUCA IS THREE!!!

On its third anniversary, AFRUCA outlines its key achievements campaigning against the abuse of African children

AFRUCA - Africans Unite Against Child Abuse was set up in May 2001 to promote the welfare of African Children. Since its inception, this young organisation has made its mark through its efforts to put the welfare of African children in the UK at the top of the agenda of government organisations and other agencies working with children in the country.

"African children, probably more than any other group of children in the UK today face so many challenges. It is right that we work to ensure those responsible for policies on children's issues consider their specific needs and priorities to ensure they are protected from harm and abuse at the hands of others" says Debbie Ariyo, AFRUCA Director.

In February 2002, the organisation submitted written evidence to the Victoria Climbié Inquiry and took part in the seminars that formed phase two of the Inquiry's work. "It was important for the Inquiry to be made aware of the fact that there are other children like Victoria Climbié who equally experience a lot of abuse and exploitation at the hands of other people. Children who are privately fostered or trafficked into the UK face potential harm and something urgent should be done to protect them" said Debbie Ariyo.

AFRUCA has also been actively working within the community to raise awareness of the vulnerability of children and the need to work together to protect them from harm. Its inaugural conference "The Challenges of Migration: The Experiences of the African Child in the UK" was held in the aftermath of the deaths of newly arrived children like Damilola Taylor, Jude Akapa and Victoria Climbié, to explore the challenges facing migrant African children and provide recommendations to help their settling in. One of the key recommendations emanating from the event was the need to organise induction programmes for new arrivals. AFRUCA, with funding from the Children and Young People's Unit, has since taken this on board by organising a number of induction classes for newly arrived young people in the North London area. The classes provide the young people with a space to talk about their experiences as young Africans living in a different environment, discuss key issues confronting them at school, including bullying, and learn different personal development techniques to help them cope with the changes in their young lives.

Similar classes are also organised for newly arrived parents who might not be familiar with the regulations governing family relationships and children's rights in the UK. The aim is to equip them with the necessary knowledge and information to aid their parenting skills. AFRUCA acknowledges that migrant African parents also encounter a number of challenges not least in coming to terms with the differences in the way children are brought up. However, it is important that they are also aware of the law so they can better safeguard their children.

Aside working within the community, AFRUCA is actively working with professionals and other practitioners to help improve their working knowledge of African children and their families. AFRUCA is frequently called upon to take lead parts in training activities for different professionals on child protection and child welfare issues. In July last year, it held a two-day

National Conference "Safeguarding African Children in the 21st Century" in Leicester with support from the NSPCC and was attended by a mainly professional audience. The conference provided a platform to brainstorm on the key issues affecting the welfare of African children and their families and explore future strategies to meet their needs.

One of the key issues focused on at the event was the growing problem of the trafficking of African children to the UK. AFRUCA is seriously concerned about this group of children and the risks they face since there is really no way of reaching them and meeting their needs. Apart from the traffickers, it is usually possible that no one else is aware of the existence of the children in this country. Most of the time, they might not even appear on any government agency's records as living in the UK. This means that if anyone has it in mind to seriously hurt a child, they are well able to do so. The case of "Boy Adam", the little boy found floating in the River Thames two years ago is a case in point.

As a first step in tackling the problem, in November 2002, AFRUCA held a community meeting in London to examine the increase in children brought to the country for the purposes of domestic servitude, sexual exploitation and even ritual killing. "It is very clear from media reports, research and anecdotal evidence that the main reason why more and more children are brought in to the country is because of that belief back home that they are coming to experience a better life. However, we know from different cases of children seriously harmed or killed that this is not always the case", said Debbie Ariyo. This is the main reason why we decided it is high time we take the anti-trafficking message back home so people there are aware of the potential dangers children can face when they come here for that elusive "better life".

AFRUCA has started this awareness raising process through the successful holding of its inaugural awareness raising seminar in Lagos, Nigeria in October 2003. The event "Trafficking of African Children to the UK: Denouncing the Better Life Syndrome" helped to alert the media, other NGOs, the government and the generality of Nigerians to the growing number of Nigerian children trafficked to the UK. The event was supported by a series of media programmes and other community events. AFRUCA is also looking at proposals to hold similar programmes in other African countries where there is a high risk of children trafficked to the UK and Europe.

Aside its awareness raising activities on child trafficking, AFRUCA is of the view that for its work to have any major impact, it needs to have a presence in Africa itself. "Whichever way you look at it, poverty is the main reason why our children suffer so much. Our international work to combat child abuse will not have much success if we don't work with others to address the issue of poverty and its impact on Africa's development. This is where the real work lies and we look forward to working with others of a similar mind to achieve this." Debbie Ariyo said.

For further information about AFRUCA - Africans Unite Against Child Abuse and details of our 3rd anniversary celebrations, please visit our website at www.afruca.org