

**A Holistic Approach  
To  
Culturally Challenging  
Needs OF African Families**

**A Diary Of Cases Typical Of The  
Services We Provide**

**June 2008**

## INDEX

<b>Content</b>	<b>Page/s</b>
<i>Introduction</i> .....	3
◇ <i>Our Object, Vision, Mission, Our Strategy,</i>	
◇ <i>Quality Standard, Our Policies, Our Referral</i>	
◇ <i>Aim of the cases diary</i> .....	5
<i>Family support through Mediation to achieve</i>	
<i>Legal Redress: (Cases 1 and 2)</i> .....	5-11
<i>Individual Advocacy/Counselling: (Cases 3 and 4)</i> .....	11-13
<i>International trafficking for Domestic Work and abuse</i>	
<i>(Cases 5 and 6)</i> .....	13-14
<i>Mental Health (Cases 7 and 8)</i> .....	15-16
<i>Age Concern for Africans (Case 9)</i> .....	16-18
<i>School support and positive mentoring (cases 10 and 11)</i> .....	18-21
<i>Youth Programme</i> .....	21-22
<i>Hate Crime (racism) work with Southwark Police (Case 12)</i> ...	22-23
<i>Criminal Justice (cases 13 and 14)</i> .....	23-24.
<i>Unaccompanied Vulnerable Adults/ Heathrow Airport</i>	
<i>(Cases 15 and 16)</i> .....	24-26
<i>Community Involvement: Cultural events</i> .....	26
<i>Campaign against Female Circumcision</i> ... ..	27
<i>Need for research</i> ... ..	27
<i>What people have said about our services in writing</i> .....	27-29
<i>Samples of On-Going Cases:</i>	
◇ <i>Domestic Violence (Case 17)</i>	29-31
◇ <i>Proof of Paternity for father’s responsibility (Case 18)</i> .	31-32
<i>Homelessness and Poverty in London/Expression of</i>	
<i>Gratitude</i> .....	32
.....(case 19)	
<i>Employment Dispute/ our intervention/Expression</i>	
<i>of Gratitude</i> .....	32
..... (Case 20)	
<i>The Launch of African Women’s Week and a</i>	
<i>conference on the impact of money remittance</i>	
<i>on African Families living in the UK(13-3-08)</i>	
<i>Nigeria, Egypt, Sudan, Liberia, South Africa, Eritrea</i>	33

## Introduction

Women Of Africa is a charity registered in the UK.

### **Our Object includes**

- Relief of poverty, sickness, distress and the advancement of education, preservation and promotion of good health among Africans in the UK generally

To further the stated object, the charity is governed by a Constitution and has a Board of Trustees.

The day to day running of Women Of Africa is entrusted to a Chief Executive Officer who heads and co-ordinate the efforts of mainly volunteers and young adults on work placement from time to time.

### **Our Vision**

Empowered African parents able to nurture; protect and support their children economically and emotionally within the UK wider community.

### **Our Mission**

Our project aims to integrate the African community into wider UK society in order to reduce isolation; poverty, cultural misunderstanding and improve the chances of new citizens.

### **Our Strategy**

Based on the need to provide a service that is culturally suited to our beneficiaries, we commence every initial assess of needs with consideration of the circumstances surrounding the need presented. Thereafter, service we provide is tailored to meet the need in the appropriate perspective. This holistic approach has proven to be the most effective way of supporting the African community in the UK.

### **Our Quality Standard**

Women Of Africa continues to work within its sector specific standards Agreement in that: and holds the following quality marks

Community Legal Services	26/03/04		General Help
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Office of Immigration Services Commission	11.03.05	Competency assessment took place on 24.4.07 based on knowledge of Immigration Law	Level one
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### **Our Policies**

The charity operates strictly within its competent policies in the following areas: -

- Equal Opportunity;
- Confidentiality
- Health and Safety;
- Child protection
- Financial Policy
- User participation in the work experience provision for schools and colleges
- User participation in the design, delivery, monitoring, evaluation and development of future projects.

WOA is committed to networking in order to increase awareness of statutory agencies and other sector service providers. This Policy ensures that there is a robust exchange of good practice between WOA and other sector providers. This is particularly important as this organisation mediates cultural difference between the African and UK cultures.

### **Our Referral Policy**

Being an agency of cultural mediation, our project constantly deals with individual cases referred to us for cultural interpretation and support. Therefore our clients come to us either through self-referral or other professionals such as Social Services; Heathrow Social Services for unaccompanied minors and others

Having identified the diverse needs of a particular case, our project during the casework, refer or work with others such as: -

- Solicitors for families and the family Court and criminal justice;
- Educational Institutions: for school support
- The Local Authority for child protection
- Local Authority Housing
- The Police for racial attacks and cultural translation
- GPs
- Other professionals

Our project in working through the problems of Africans to achieve the required outcomes has found that there is a linkage to Africa and other countries.

### **Work Experience through Volunteering**

WOA prides herself in the opportunity she creates for members of the African community to obtain work experience through volunteering to gain administrative skills necessary to gain paid employment. This is geared towards reducing poverty level that is prevalent within the community.

### **Equal Opportunity**

In line with our equal opportunity Policy, our volunteering scheme is also being utilised by non-Africans. This way, our project is providing opportunity for non-Africans to gain insight into the African community and the cultural richness Africans bring with them to London.

### **Our Aim**

This document aims to showcase cases that are typical of the services we provide to African families and professionals working through the following **areas of service provision** amongst others to highlight the nature and complexity of the needs that Africans bring with them for support. We have deliberately changed the names, time and places.

## **Family support through Mediation to achieve Legal Redress**

The following are two cases highlighting practices that are entrenched within African culture but alien to UK culture. Through the cultural mediation we provided, both problems were resolved through the Family Court System.

### **Fracture resulting from massaging the African way**

**Case 1 of 18 cases**

#### **Facts:**

A distressed mother contacted us by telephone one evening to say that Social Services was about to take away her four months old baby who was at the time on admission in hospital for fractures that could not be explained. Mum pleaded for WOA to prevent the baby being taken from her. She was at the time breast-feeding the baby.

We explained that we are unable to prevent the baby being taken away at that point, but that we will be able to support her through the process to ensure that the baby is returned to her at a future date. For failing to prevent the transfer of parental right to the Local Authority, mum lost

faith in WOA on the one hand, and hated social services on the other hand.

We had no doubt that mum loves her baby dearly but, how did little Onome sustain her fractures? For one year, this became a major problem for our project, social services, the solicitor representing mum, medical professionals, psychologists and the Family Court Judges.

A “Causation Hearing” concluded that mum was responsible for the fracture of Onome’s bones. Medical authorities ruled out “brittle bones” as being the cause of the fractures. Mum was facing criminal charges and baby Onome was to be put out for adoption.

Then as a last resort, the Family Court Assessment Team in the course of preparing their final report for the final Family Court hearing called our office for cultural support and clearance, we informed the social worker that WOA was already aware of this case. We requested that Miss Ojo (mum) should be asked to contact us for a “brainstorming exercise” to consider how Onome could have obtained the fractures. A one to one session with mum was duly scheduled and delivered.

### **Our Findings**

After three hours of brainstorming and discussion with mum, we established that Onome’s fractures occurred during mum’s massaging of Onome according to African practices during first weeks of birth. We asked mum to show us the location of the fractures. These locations coincided with massaging according to this African practice.

Mum insisted that she had constantly informed social Services, the medical team the psychologists, her solicitors and during the “Causation Hearing” at the Family court that she massaged her baby Onome but that everyone maintained that “massaging” could never break bones. True, massaging in Western way would never break bones. But, massaging the African way could break bones.

We informed the Court Assessment Team that after three hours session with mum, we have found out how Onome sustained her fractures. It was as a result of mum’s massaging her the African way. A session was arranged for WOA to accompany mum to demonstrate how she massaged Onome.

The FCAT was concerned that it may be difficult to get the Court to accept our findings given that so much time and money had gone into this case, they wanted to know if I could come to Court at short notice to confirm this African practice. Thus, although I was not in Court on the

day of the hearing, I was in the office waiting to be called in at very short notice.

After much bewilderment by the UK professionals including the Judge at the Family Court, the request to put Onome out for adoption was averted I did not have to go to Court.

The Judge gave “Leave” to Miss Ojo to sue the Family Court for its earlier decision at the “Causation Hearing”: A hearing that criminalised her for the fracture sustained by Onome. Mum decided not to sue.

### **Outcome**

Onome was returned to Miss Ojo after one year in foster care.

### **Public Response**

This case following its reporting in the Guardian “Society” section triggered public response from across London. Social workers called to say they too were working on similar cases and did not know how to deal with them.

The family court team of the NSPCC regarding cultural support for their cases also contacted our project.

Members of the general public contacted our project to commend us for our contribution to cultural understanding in London. A Southwark woman even invited me to come to tea at her house.

## **Private Fostering**

### **Supporting Parents and Mediation to achieve Legal Redress**

Case 2 of 18 cases

African parents rely on private fostering of their children. Thus, although mum lives in London her two children were fostered in Wales. Both children were fostered privately when they were a few months old.

Our project was contacted by the Social Services in Wales to tell us that Miss Ogun needed support to deal with the prospect of her losing her two children to their foster mother.

### **The Facts**

The two children until 2002 spent school holidays including Christmas with their mother in London. Mum paid an agreed sum to the foster mother every months, and pays for everything that the children needed.

In 2002 the foster mother took legal advice on how to stop the children from ever returning to their mother in London, alleging that the 11 years old child has a quarrel with her biological mother and as such, wants

parental right transferred to her the foster mother. Although the 7 years old is happy to come to his/her biological mother, the foster parent claimed that the two children are inseparable.

A Family Court Proceedings was instituted for the transfer of parental rights to the foster mother on account of the two children. The biological mother continued to pay for the children's up-keep but could not see the children.

The Social Services became involved and the Court granted a residence Order, transferring parental rights to the foster mother for an initial period of 6 months. The Court requested for a report under **“Section 7 of the 1989 Children's Act.”**

The biological mother who was unaware of what the problem was between her and her 11 years old child became very distressed at the prospect of losing her only two children to the foster mother she had trusted. Mum was greatly isolated as the children's father was in Africa.

Independent Advocates were assigned to each of the children. At a meeting convened to hold in Wales, WOA accompanied the mother from London for the purpose of supporting and representing the distressed mother and to act as an independent arbiter in this case.

**At the end of the family conference in Wales the following was agreed: -**

1. That although the children wanted to remain with their foster mother according to the report of their Advocate, the relevant adults needed to go beyond the immediate wish of the children and to take a long term view given the long term impact of the transfer of parental rights.
2. That there was a need to recognise that the children are separate individuals, as such that the older child's issues with their mother should not automatically include the younger child.

In this case, we stressed the philosophy of parental rights as the basis of responsibility for children under the age of 16 years according to English law. Therefore we argued that to allow a 7 years old and 11 years old children to decide whether to extinguish their biological origin or not, amounted to a let down of the children by the relevant adults in their lives.

### **The Outcome**

The 7 years old child was removed from the Residence Order. The foster mother found this very distressing, as she wanted the two children. She insisted that she was worried about the safety of the 7 years old whilst in

the custody of her biological parent. We thanked her for her interest but assured her that the biological parent loves the children equally.

After three sessions held in Wales, the Social Services concluded plans for the younger of the two children to return to London permanently.

On arrival in London, mum and the 7years old child called at the WOA office, the child was over the moon for coming home. It was gratifying to observe the child hugging her mother and telling her stories about her time in Wales.

### **Advice**

Immigration advice and welfare rights based on status forms a major aspect of our support services. The basis of our advice service is to empower families to make informed choices as they make decision that affect their lives and that of their children.

Our experience show that for the majority of the cases that are referred to us by other agencies and legal centres, immigration status is like a golden thread that runs through every difficulty being experienced by Africans in London. Depending on the circumstances, we are unable to help if the circumstances of the case are such that the immigration aspect could not be resolved.

If there is a prospect of the person applying successfully to the Home Office to regularise their immigration status, our project would refer the client to Immigration Adviser independent of our project. Where the person already has an immigration adviser, we discuss the prospect of the case succeeding.

### **Example: -**

A mother in need of housing was referred to our project by Social Services: -

### **Facts**

- The 2 years old child is British and a subject of an Order not to be removed from the UK without leave from the High Court and her father.
- Mum has an application for indefinite leave to remain pending with Home Office.
- Mother is a victim of domestic violence
- Mother is a prominent member of a church where pressure was being brought to bear by the church authority and elders to make the woman “do as she is told”

Because of the child's status and circumstances our project contacted Homeless families' unit for possible housing with no success.

In fact, mum visited our office days later to say that when she insisted that she did not have anywhere to go, the housing officer dealing with her case called the Police and she and her child spent the night at the Police Station.

We found this outcome very upsetting and intimidating but could do nothing about it.

- We contacted hostels with no success.

As the influence of the church was making it difficult for the mother to get help from within the community, we contacted the Overseer of the relevant church to plead his support and understanding for the mother and her child to settle.

The Overseer expressed great displeasure with the mother who was also an elder in his church he said that he could not help as long as mum remains adamant in her refusal to obey church command.

We then decided to contact the father of the child who we are told is an elder at the same church. This man was even more furious and refused our appeal to support his child.

Mum alleged that the reason the father of the child and the entire church was angry with her was because, she refused to be a part of an arrangement whereby, the father of her child brings his wife from Africa and she is kept on the side as his "other family".

This mother alleged extreme domestic abuse during the time she lived with the father of her child, claiming that while she was pregnant, the man so beat her that social services placed her in a hostel where she stayed until the child was born. But then she moved back with the abusive man.

On the immigration aspect of this case, we informed the adviser that we are supporting the mother and the child although we had been unable to secure a dwelling for her.

Then the Home Office invited the mother to attend an interview for asylum claim, we knew that this was not an asylum claim. We therefore protested to the adviser not to accompany her to an asylum screening knowing that the claim would fail along this line. Although the adviser

was unhappy about us telling him what to do, he corrected the error by the Home Office.

### **Outcome**

The mother was housed within the community and the Home Office changed the grounds for immigration claim.

This case was one that had the potential to last a long time and as WOA lacks the capacity to stay on any one case for too long, it faded into the unknown.

## **Individual Advocacy/Counselling**

Our project advocates for members of the African community on a wide range of issues. Two cases will be showcased under this heading to highlight some of the problems needing support through advocacy.

### **Individual Advocacy/Counselling Case 3 of 18 cases**

#### **Facts**

An African woman walked into our offices asking for another project within the premises. We provided the information she needed. Then she said, “I am an African woman” meaning that she too deserved attention from our project. We explained that we did not know that she needed support from our project being that she asked for information. We saw for the first time that she looked depressed and untidy. We immediately embraced her and diverted attention to her.

Her story was that she had been with her partner who she said she supported through difficult time for many years, when he had no money she was there, he lived with her and her only child.

Then this man won the lottery and became well off, instead of giving her some amount to spend on herself, this man bought a large house and moved away, he gave ten per cent of that money to the church. Instead of the church to advice the man to take care of her and her daughter, they assisted him to get himself another woman. This mother cried her eyes out in distress and disappointment.

We spent some time consoling this woman who had dropped in for the very first time.

On her second visit she produced a letter written to her by her employer telling her that she had been suspended from work pending an investigation of an incident that took place during her shift. She was

crying again. We studied the content of the letter in order to understand the issues involved.

A disciplinary hearing was scheduled for the next week our mother was convinced that all of this was happening because of some bad luck following her. Our first challenge was to convince her that all of this was coincidental and that WOA will be there for her all the way.

Mum told us that she was advised by a solicitor not to attend the hearing as she will be able to take employer to the Tribunal if she is dismissed as being indicated by the letter sent to mum.

Our position was that there was a need for her to follow due process by attending the disciplinary hearing as scheduled.

Our project notified the employer that we would be accompanying this mother to the disciplinary hearing as scheduled. There were two hearing to consider the alleged incidents against her. It was obvious that management had made up their minds as to the guilt of this woman; this caused us great concern as we felt that this woman's point was not been taken on board. She was empowered by the fact that she was not alone. Meetings held into the night, I had to leave at 10pm on the last day of proceedings and final decision.

### **Outcome**

The woman was able to keep her job. The transformation in her morale was astonishing, she told everybody about the services she received from WOA and how her life changed within a very short period of time.

This woman volunteered with our project announcing to the world how Women Of Africa saved her life.

As for her partner, she became resolved that the man was not good for her in the first place and that she is no longer interested in the money he won.

Then, one day she called our office to tell us that the church pastor who was advising her partner had been caught engaging in bogus marriages in the church for payment, that he was being sentenced to time in prison. This is true.

### **Individual Advocacy Services Case 4 of 18 cases**

### **Facts**

**Advice and Advocacy is the corner stone of the services that we provide for example**

A woman who said she took a joint mortgage with her brother some years again and defaulted and the mortgage was foreclosed with them loosing

their investment contacted our project. The property was auctioned thereafter.

Then out of nowhere about ten years later, the lady received a letter from a company claiming to be acting for the mortgage lenders to recover the shortfall in the amount recovered from the sale of the property. The shortfall amounted to £53,000.00.

The woman was so unhappy she was referred to our project by an Advice Centre for culturally specific support. She was particularly worried as she said she had newly married and did not tell her husband about this problem. Now, she did not know how her husband would react to this problem.

Our project supported this woman, we requested this company to produce the full details of the original loan to enable us ensure that payment was made as soon as possible. In response, someone who claimed to be acting on behalf of the Company telephoned our project requesting to speak with me, as they wanted to discuss terms. I declined the offer and insisted they must write and supply the information our project is seeking.

### **Outcome**

The company could not produce the original details of the loan and as such, could not sustain the claim against our lady. Problem was solved and her marriage was saved.

## **International trafficking for Domestic Work and abuse**

Our project has been at the forefront of the campaign against international trafficking and supporting victims of trafficking.

### **International trafficking for Domestic Work and abuse Case 5 of 18 cases**

A hospital social worker came into our office one day with a case file.

### **The facts**

A teenager was admitted to the hospital haven collapsed from exhaustion. The young person turned out to be a person being used as a servant within the community.

We were informed that she does the housework and served every member of the family. According to the social worker, the young woman is visibly afraid of her Madam whenever she visited the hospital.

The social worker asked if there was any way our project could help as she is very concerned about the number of African women being admitted to the hospital who are visibly afraid but yet there was nothing anyone could do.

### **Our Findings**

We very well know this abuser of this young adult, so that, taking on this case could have led to our project being negatively targeted. Understanding the severity of the risk that the young lady is in, we offered to: -

- Make contact with her family back in Africa if this young lady could give us information about her background
- Contact the authority here anonymously

The hospital social worker that brought this case to us also talked about her concerns for other African women who are admitted to the hospital constantly as victims of domestic within African families. According to the social worker, these victims are usually too frightened to “talk” and too “hopeless” to run away from their abusers. They are always discharged back into the abusive situation.

### **Outcome**

Our project although could not openly help this victim of international trafficking and domestic violence, contacted a researcher who works on international trafficking to help us find out how we can help without being targeted by madam and her family.

Verbal report we got from this independent “under-cover” support told us that efforts to make contact with this young lady failed. They had to let go.

<b>International trafficking for Domestic Work and abuse Case 6 of 18 cases</b>
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### **Facts**

A woman of 61 years old came into our office one day to say that she was helped into the UK from Sweden by a couple. She said she has relatives in the UK but she does not have their contact.

### **Our Finding**

The old lady claimed that the couple helped her, as she came into the UK with their travelling documents and they paid the fares.

We could not work out what the couple hoped to gain and why the woman chose to come to the UK.

However, as we traced her history in Africa, we found that we know the relatives she said she has in the UK but did not have their contact. We told the 61 years old woman that we know her relatives and have the contact. She cried for joy.

### **Outcome**

We reunited the old woman with her family and that was our job done. Both cases highlight the fact that being a member of the African community we serve has its advantages but can also heighten challenges.

## **Mental Health**

A large number of Africans find it difficult to deal successfully with many challenges that face them in the UK. Many will turn to the church for spiritual and or emotional support while others do end up with mental health problems.

This knowledge is one of the reasons that our project works so vigorously with families and professionals.

Although we are aware that there is an increase in the number of Africans ending up mental hospitals and living in the community with mental problems, we have been unable to actively meet the demand for support in this area due to lack of capacity. **Examples:**

### **Mental Health Case 7 of 18 cases**

Our project was contacted one day by a woman who claimed to being harassed by the system on the ground that she is mentally ill. According to her, she was being followed.

As she live alone in the community she said that the Council has refused to carry out repairs to her dwelling as per her requests and that as a result of this refusal, the flat is falling apart.

She said that she is being forced to attend a centre for people with mental health problem and that the workers at the centre are picking on her.

She asked that our project support her in achieving the following: -

- That the Council should affect the necessary repairs to her flat
- That the Police should stop following her, as she is not doing harm to anybody.
- That she be discharged from the mental health centre

Our project required documented record on her case to enable us provide professional support to her. We needed to work with other agencies involved in this case to reach a realistic outcome.

We contacted the Centre and discussed with this lady's key-worker. They were happy that our lady referred herself to us for support, however the Centre said they needed written consent from our lady to enable them release the information our project was requiring to us.

We communicated this and reminded our lady to give her written consent for us to proceed with her case. She wrote a consent document but asked that the information should be handed to her. According to her and confirmed by the Centre, this woman went to the Centre many times seeking to collect our record.

Our project was contacted one day by Lewisham Hospital where the records are kept to reinforce the request for written consent for them to release the information to us. We communicated this to our lady who remained adamant that the record must pass through her to us.

Our lady called the office one day to requesting a home visit as council officers were visiting her at home. We explained that this was not possible as we already had other commitment for that day. We explained that our project lacks the capacity to do home visit without prior notice.

### **Outcome**

This case could not be followed up as we lacked formal information and manpower to follow through on the needs of this woman.

## **Mental Health Case 8 of 18 cases**

A lady that claimed that she was being followed by plain clothes Police contacted our project. She asked that we support her to stop the following.

During our discussion of her circumstances, the lady informed us that her partner who is the father of her two children had being involved in crime using her address. According to her, the partner has moved out of her dwelling and still there are plain-clothes officers following her everywhere she went.

### **Outcome**

This case could not be followed up as our project lacked the capacity to do so. There was insufficient information to enable us act.

## **Age Concern for Africans Case 9 of 18 cases**

The Africans community is aging without a corresponding support in place to enable them meets their day to day needs. Our project is aware

that the African community is highly isolated and unable to integrate into wider society. This is more so for the old members of the community. Many are trapped in their home alone without support.

Our project is aware that there have been cases where aged Africans lived alone and died in their homes and no-one knew about this for weeks.

In a particular case, this aged member of our community contacted our project.

According to her, she has many problems but did not know who could trust to help her. She then began to pray and a month later, she thought to contact our project although she did not know about our project.

**Our findings following home visit:**

According to the old lady, when she arrived the UK in the 1960s her husband told her not to let anyone know about anything she does in this country as the Immigration Authority might deport her to Africa. She believed him such that in all her years in the UK she never claimed any benefit to which she was entitled.

- She raised five children in the UK as a single parent and did once claim family allowance for any of the child.
- She paid for school dinners for all her children through the educational system although she struggled financially throughout.
- She never claimed housing benefit, so she paid full rent throughout
- When she was young and economically active, she had a stall at Brixton market and took goods to Africa to sell.
- The old lady cried saying that now she is old she is unable to sustain herself and pay her full rent like she used to do.
- She was in arrears with her rent for which she was being threatened with eviction order.
- She said she has no money left and that she was hungry.

Although we knew about her children, we avoided reference to them as we worked through the problems she presented.

We explained that her ex-husband lied when he told her that there was a risk of her being deported to Africa if she told any one about what was happening in her life.

She told us that she endured violence from this man for fear of being deported to Africa. We explained that there was nothing that can be done for what was past, but that we are able to support her immediately to deal with the money matters.

### **Outcome**

We accompanied the old lady to apply for Income Support and then to the housing office to apply for housing benefit backdating the benefit for as far as possible to clear the rent arrears. By the end of that day, this old lady had her money problems solved through the appropriate support she received from our project.

### **Long Term Prospect**

We are aware of the fact that as I write, this old lady's maisonette dwelling is now inappropriate as she is unable to climb the stairs like she did when she was younger. She is almost house bound.

### **Our challenges**

This old lady is always in touch with us by telephone demanding outreach support. Our project is unable to provide the support old Africans many of whom are house bound need.

## **Family School Support and Positive Mentoring**

### **Case 10 of 18 cases**

Our project prides herself in our efforts to work with parents to reduce the rate of school exclusion to raise academic standards and better chances for new citizens. **Examples: -**

An African mother referred herself to our project to seek support to attend a Police Station interview following an incident of racial attack of which her son was involved.

We accompanied the mother and her son involved to the interview at the end of which, she said she also needed support to attend a school exclusion hearing to decide whether her youngest son should be permanently excluded from school or not.

The exclusion hearing was scheduled to take place within the hour. We did not have the details of the case and so had no idea of the issues involved but we had to be there at the school.

### **The Facts**

The son arrived from Africa within the 6 months preceding the hearing to unite with mum and the other siblings. Mum is a lone parent. Also present at the hearing was the family social worker. Being that we did not have the facts at that stage, we had to listen.

The head teacher whose decision to permanently exclude the boy briefed the governing body of the school of the circumstances leading to the decision.

Then the family Social Worker attempted to speak the head teacher jumped him questioning his authority to be present at the hearing. I immediately interpreted this development as the head teacher's attempt to intimidate us to silence so as to secure a desired outcome posing a huge challenge to the mother and her son.

The family's Social Worker could not proceed after that attack, he withdrew.

I stepped in to support the mother and her young son both of who were now looking very upset in fact, the mother began to cry.

I assured the head teacher that although no one could force her to keep the young child in her school, it is necessary for her to understand that the mother and her son had a right of hearing. And as such must be allowed to inform the school governors of her side of the events leading to the child's exclusion from school.

In tears the mother informed the hearing that since her son arrived in the country and into the educational system she has had problems.

The child transferred from a primary school to secondary within a short time of arriving in the country. Mum who cried throughout said that her son came to this particular school because she already had two of her other children in the school.

The child fought on his first and second day of arriving at the school on the third day he was excluded for two days. On his first day back after serving the two days, he was excluded again.

Within 3 months of arriving at the school, he was being permanently excluded.

Mum said that seeing the difficulty that her youngest son was having in school, she decided to visit her son's school frequently to support him. This the mum said did not please the head teacher and so on one occasion, the head teacher instructed the school's security man to physically carry her out of the school. Mum was crying to the discomfort of everyone including the family social worker.

The 12 years boy was then asked to tell the hearing what he thinks happened. This child talked about the fact that on arriving in the school, he said "he was minding his business when at the playground other children played and pushed others against him he in turn fell on top of other children"

Rather than talk to the children who pushed others against him, the school authority chose him to punish. Then he was asked not to come to school for two days (exclusion). Then on his return the same pushing happened again and this time the head teacher was angry with him. He tried to explain but the head teacher did not want to know. So he followed the head teacher to her office and knelt down in front of her to beg her (an African practice). The 12 years old narrated how the head teacher said that he is from an illiterate family and asked him to get out. He said he did not know what to do so he left. Mum continued to cry.

There was visible shock in the room. As people regained their composure I expressed dissatisfaction at the head teacher's handling of the case and suggested that it would appear that we have not learnt from the Damilola Taylor experience.

The head teacher came for me and said I did not have a right to refer to the Damilola Taylor experience and that she was going to take me on. I told her that she should name the place the day and the time and that I in turn was ready for her. It was an intimidating experience.

### **Outcome**

- The Pupils' Exclusion Officer of the Education Dept. called to congratulate us for the outcome of the exclusion meeting. According to the officer, that was the first time anyone has been able to stand up to the head teacher in these cases.
- The school's governing body in its decision, rejected the head teacher's recommendation to permanently exclude this newly arrived 12 years old.
- There was a recommendation that an appropriate support process should be put in place to enable this child settle into his new environment and into the school system.
- The Local Authority Pupil school exclusion officer recommended that the school should work with our project to achieve the required outcome.
- We tried to mend fences with the head teacher given that the population of African children in her school is significant by agreeing a social meal out. Unfortunately, before the date scheduled, the head teacher was summarily dismissed from her job.

Thereafter, the young boy visited our office at intervals to tell us that he has settled down well and progressing with his work.

He stayed in touch for some time spending some time during his school holidays helping out in the office.

**School Support and Positive mentoring**  
**Case 11 of 18 cases**

A mother who volunteered with our project informed us of how her 14 years old was not doing well in school. We discussed issues.

**Finding**

The mother told us how the boy was becoming detached from her, refusing to communicate with her at home and becoming very withdrawn. The picture being painted by the mother was different from what we had known of this young boy that was very happy when he first arrived from Africa. In those days, he smiled a lot and said how happy he was being reunited with her mother.

We expressed concern over the young man's change of temperament. The mother told us that things have gotten so bad that the 14 years is refusing to sleep in his bedroom at night. Instead, he was sleeping in the sofa in the living with a stick at his side. He avoided his mother. We were amazed.

We asked mum to describe the child's typical week, this included mum insisting that the boy attended church on Wednesdays and Sundays. During our session with mum, she admits that she was the reason her son has become the person he was becoming. Mums said she was insisting that her son goes to church and do things her way.

During our sessions with mum and son things began to improve, we persuaded mum to leave her son out of her religious activities until such time that he is able to make his own decision to attend church. The boy began to rebuild his confidence. To assist him in catching up on his academic work we attached him to a young man of his own age who will know is working well in school.

**Outcome**

Together the two boys began to establish a positive relationship, the troubled boy started to rebuild his interest in school.

Although his concentration on his school work was disrupted

With positive mentoring, this young man was able to leave school with vocational qualifications, mum was very happy.

His self-confidence improved.

**Our Youth Program: -**

We provide opportunity for work placement for 14 to 15 years old in formal education to gain work experience.

**This service line aims to: -**

- Create an opportunity for the youth to build self confidence.
- Raise academic standards through awareness of future role in society.
- Gain the position of advantage in the future work place.
- Gain an insight into individual's multi- roles in society such as in the family, school and amongst friends.
- Gain Basic skills that can be used in everyday activities and also for the future in a successful career.
- Understand the concept of 'self' as the basis for positive role in society as new citizens.

In order to showcase the effectiveness of this project for our youth, we have asked permission to include his report at the end of his 10 days in this diary of cases as follows: -

**Hate crimes (racism) Work with Southwark Police**

Case 12 of 18 cases

A family our project was supporting called at 10pm one Sunday to say that she was being physically attacked by a group of white youths and that one of her son's mouth was bleeding as a result of one of the youth hitting his mouth with his head.

We were already aware that this family has suffered racial abuse at this address from where they are being housed in temporary accommodation at a different part of the Borough for their safety.

As we had the Detective Inspector's personal pager a distressed call was put through to the DI who responded by dispatching four officers to the family in distress.

As the attacking youths were still with the family, they stayed on the telephone with us for reassurance. We informed mum that four Police Officers were on their way to her and the children.

Throughout the night the four Police Officers stayed with the family. On arrival at the scene of the attack, two of the Police Officer took the injured son to casualty and emergency of the local hospital for treatment. Two of the Officers paid a visit to the white youths who attacked the African youths.

**Finding**

Due to the prompt response by the Met Police in getting to the family, the offending youth was met with the cut he sustained in the racial attack

when he hit the other youth's mouth with his head. Blood and tooth mark were there as evidence.

As the officers stayed with me throughout the night by telephone, the family were safely escorted to their temporary accommodation.

### **Outcome**

The distressed family received the support that they needed promptly. For the first time, the offending youths were caught in the act and successfully prosecuted.

The Detective Inspector was very happy with the outcome of this case she said that this outcome was possible because of the prompt action by our project. She asked that this case should be showcased to assure the African community that the Police can achieve positive outcome for the community.

As our project moved away to deal with another family, there was no time to celebrate the success of this one case.



### **Criminal Justice Case 13 of 18 cases**

An elderly woman came into our office one day to say that she was arrested as she attempted to travel to Africa at the Airport. This woman has been in the UK since the 1960s,.

### **The Facts**

Mum was travelling with an African passport but had her British passport for her return journey to the UK. It was found that the African passport was a forgery and was therefore arrested and detained at the immigration detention centre.

Our project contacted a firm of solicitor that we have used in the past who accepted to represent the lady in the case to clear her name.

We testified to the fact that the lady is a highly respected member of the African community who was aware that the African passport that was issued in Africa was a forgery.

If convicted, the lady would have been sent to prison.

### **Outcome**

Our support through the legal process led to the lady being found not guilty. Our project is grateful to the firms of Solicitors that have continued to trust our judgment in the cases we refer to them from time to time.

**Criminal Justice  
Case 14 of 18 cases**

Three 15 years old were convicted for a murder that did not happen according to the facts of this case.

After the Court of Appeal turned down an Application for the youths to appeal against their conviction, the parents came to our project for support.

Following our submission to the Court of Appeal, the three Appeal Court Judges granted the application for the young men to appeal against their conviction on the ground of CAUSATION. Our project failed to secure a change in the young men's defence team led to a collapse of appeal.

**Outcome**

Our project has now sent the case to the Criminal Cases Review Commission with the view of getting it back to the Court of Appeal with a view to over turning the murder conviction for which the men are presently serving jail terms in Youth Offending Institutions.

**Unaccompanied Vulnerable Adults/ Heathrow Airport**

Heathrow Airport Social Services contacted our project.

**Unaccompanied Vulnerable Adults/ Heathrow Airport  
Case 15 of 18 cases**

Our project was contacted and informed of unaccompanied young British/Africans who arrived at the airport three days prior. Age: 19years; 17years and 15years. As they travelled with their British passport, they passed through immigration without anyone realising that they travelled unaccompanied and that nobody was there to meet them. They roamed the airport during the day and slept on the chairs at night for three nights before they were noticed.

According to the 19 years old when questioned, they left Africa without the knowledge of their parents hoping that a family friend they know would accommodate once in London. They were wrong, the friend refused to take them as they left Africa without permission.

The youths became desperate as efforts by officials failed to persuade the family friend to take them. Our project was contacted as a last resort for the Heathrow Airport officials.

In order to protect them from falling into the wrong hands, we requested the officials to send them to our office in a taxi. We then tried to persuade the family friend to take them she refused.

**Outcome:**

We reconciled the youths with their parents.

Family friend provided accommodation.

Mother returned to the UK to settle her children

Our project worked with Southwark Education and Lewisham College to place the youths back into the educational system.

This case took over two months to resolve.

**Unaccompanied Vulnerable Adults/International Trafficking  
Case 16 of 18 cases**

Heathrow Airport Social Services contacted our project.

**Facts:**

A young African mother arrived at the Airport with her one-year-old child wanting to travel to Africa without travelling documents and no ticket for herself and her child. When asked for her documents, she said she arrived to be deported.

The officers were confused. We were then contacted I had a telephone interview with the mother. She insisted she wanted to return to Africa.

**Details:**

Mother claimed that the child (aged one) was born in Nigeria, I tried to establish claim of the child being African through place of birth. I assured mother that I could get truth of her story within 24 hours if she maintains her claim that the child was born in Nigeria.

The child was taken into care around the Heathrow Airport area.

Mum was sent to spend that long weekend with Alice Ukoko in London.

**During mum's stay in London the following findings were made:**

- The mother confesses that the child was born in Ireland.
- Confesses to the fact that she is claiming asylum in Ireland in another name
- She has a three bedroom accommodation in Ireland which she let out during her intended travel
- She was claiming benefits in Ireland which she handed over to someone else to claim and remit to her in Africa
- Her own mother live in Southwark
- The child held an Irish birth certificate

She said the reason she presented herself for deportation in the UK was to afford herself free passage. Also, she had a different identity to avoid detection by the Irish immigration Authority.

When asked to obtain travelling documents she did so for herself and the one year old without difficulties.

- The child in care did not respond to the name she was given, this aroused suspicion as to whether this child was not travelling with a stranger
- The travelling documents were forged.
- The Heathrow officials in dilemma organised a DNA test of mother and child.
- I, on my part was very intrigued by developments I pressed the woman to know how easy it would be for her to return to Ireland. She assured me that she has connections and that returning was no problem.
- Heathrow questioned the fact that the woman never talked about a child

#### **Outcome within one week**

Our project presented our findings and the child's Irish birth certificate to Heathrow Airport Social Services for investigation and action.

In recognition of the cultural value that our project contributes to the positive outcomes of the Heathrow Airport groups, Alice Ukoko was invited to represent WOA at meeting of Heathrow Airport Liaison Group.

The Heathrow Airport Liaison Group was made up of representatives of agencies/bodies such as: -

- End Child prostitution and Trafficking (ECPAT-UK)
- Hounslow Social Services
- Refugee Council
- Metropolitan Police, Child Protection Unit, Heathrow
- Heathrow Travel-Care
- Immigration Terminal 3 and 4
- Social Services, Child Asylum Team
- Child and Family Welfare Advisor
- Metropolitan Police
- Refugee Arrival Project

Amongst others

### **Community Involvement: Cultural events**

From time to time, our project organises community event that creates an opportunity to engage with the public for cultural exchange.

## **Contribution to Female Circumcision widely known as Female Genital Mutilation: A dramatisation of the transition of the African girl child to womanhood stressing the life-long impact on victims**

Campaign against female circumcision using drama in contributing to the campaign against female circumcision, our project wrote and produced a drama titled: “The African Maiden” The African Maiden dramatised the transition of the African girl to womanhood including issues around female circumcision also known as female genital mutilation.

Following this drama, the current Female Circumcision Act 2003 was enacted to outlaw circumcision of young girls outside the UK.

The African Maiden videotapes are constantly in demand by legal advisers who needs support to argue their clients.

### **Need for Research**

Given the cultural uniqueness of the services we provide, issues that Africans bring with them into the UK continue to be outside the remit of orthodox researchers.

#### **Example**

The impact of the 1989 Children’s Act on the African community given the misunderstanding of African culture by the system is unknown.

Our project has collected data around the number of African children that have been taken into Local Authority Care between 2000 and 2005. WOA is aiming to commission a study using the data collected. This will be the first of its kind since 1989 Children’s Act came into effect.

### **What people have said about our services in writing**

#### **Writer A**

“I am writing to congratulate you on the wonderful Charity work you are doing to support and help people of Africa. I had never heard of this Charity (WOA) but very impressed there is such an organisation which I am sure a lot of Africans NOT aware of. My son who is currently doing his work experience with you told me so much about the type of people that come to you for help and support as well as well as having gone through your booklets and

all the work you have done in supporting Africans, I just want to say thank you and well done.

As a mental health nurse, I have experienced a great number of Africans in mental health institutions and at times it amazes me especially when young children. Will it be possible to actually find a way in which our young black children can be educated about mental health awareness in our society in order to reduce the number of young black in mental health institutions which most are due to drugs and poverty. Our children are our future and it is very worrying especially as the society is not supportive or helping.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if need be as I will be happy to be of any help as a mother myself. Thanking you and look forward to meeting you again."

### **Writer B**

"Dear WOA

I am writing this letter to thank you for allowing me the opportunity to work with you and your organisation. Your ideas and perseverance are an inspiration to anyone with commitment to make life better for the most vulnerable of people. In my brief work with your agency, I learned a great deal about how minority culture. With that, I believe I have a greater understanding of the Nigerian culture and creating better working relationships with Nigerians involved in the Social Care System.

I never would have gained this type of insight and experience in my professional in Indiana. Although, it is my understanding that Indiana is experiencing an increase in the numbers of Nigerians relocating into the area. So my work and you and your agency will hopefully not just benefit me personally, but reach those that may encounter difficulties beginning a new life in a new land.

It is my hope that you found some benefit with my role as consultant/liaison between your agency and Social Service. Again, I thank you for the opportunity. I wish your agency the best of luck in getting the Children's Programme off the ground and ready to serve the community in October."

**Writer C** (A 15 years old (work placement) writes as follows: -  
Dear WOA)

"Thank you for allowing me to spend two weeks with you at Women Of Africa. I found it very interesting and valuable in preparing me for my future career. With your support and advice I feel more confident to face the public through the phone, in myself I feel more confident that my posture shows, and I now have confidence, knowledge and understanding, "can become a somebody" in society. I have gained confidence at WOA and I now need to take this confidence to the outside world and move it up a level.

I feel I have now been introduced into life changing experience. Please thank all the people I worked with in the department, they were most helpful. Perhaps, I can come in and see you all some time and help around the organisation.

I hope the organisation can grow and become a big success in the future.

Once again thank you for having me on work experience"....

### **Samples of On-Going Cases**

We wish to highlight current cases to expose the challenges that Africans/black face in their day to day life, what some Africans seeking support present to agencies are the symptoms of more complicated underlying problems.

At WOA therefore, we are able to get to the root of the problem and aims to deal with them working with other agencies as is relevant.

**This case brings with it very serious issues**

**Take this case for instance: Domestic Violence**

**Case 17 of 18 cases**

A mother of one child (age 5 years) was referred to WOA by a Legal Centre last week. Mum presented her difficulty with a University where she is pursuing a post graduate certificate. She has had problem getting to class in time because she has to get her son to nursery before going to her University.

According to mum, she is in receipt of student loan; student grant; family tax credit for her son; family allowance and housing benefit. She is broke

and living on bank overdraft and has accumulated rent arrears. Mum says she feels isolated from the rest of the community.

**Our session with mum revealed the follow: -**

- Husband lives in Nigeria
- Has two brothers living in London but does not trouble them with her problems.
- Wants husband to come to join her in London but husband wants to remain in Nigeria.
- Does not know if husband has another family in Nigeria
- Transfers money to husband in Nigeria
- Transfers money to her sister in Nigeria on a monthly basis

Mum says she feels she will be better off if husband joins her as that will mean she will not need to support him financially in Nigeria. But, husband maintains that his prospects are better off out there.

Our session further revealed that one of the brothers living in London has a business and to finance his business the brother got her to sign a deed of guarantee and indemnity for the sum of £20,000. According to mum, she did not read the loan instrument as her brother said as his business is a limited company; she will never be required to pay any money.

As the brother did not intend to repay this debt, mum is now being requested to deliver on the DEED which is to repay the loan.

Mum has a five years old son. According to mum, her son needs a father my response was the child does not need a father who takes food from his mouth.

In dealing with this case we have taken the following steps: -

We have notified the educational institution that our project is working with this mother in order to empower her to complete the course of studies.

- We are having one to one sessions with mum to build her self confidence to enable her take control of her life.
- We are supporting mum to claim benefit to which she is entitled
- We have written to mum's GP requesting a referral for psychiatric assessment of mum. The purpose of which is to assess mum's mental fitness given the mental pressures she has had to deal with.
- We have written to mum's brother behind the £20,000.00 loan.

**Response from mum's brother**

Brother called our office to say that we have no right to interfere in his business with his sister. We told him that as his sister is an African woman we had every right to protect her and her son.

### **Anticipated outcome**

- Psychiatric assessment would reveal mum's mental state vice a vice her child safety.
- Mum's brother may in anger relieve mum of the loan burden.
- Mum is already getting back her self confidence.
- Mum will stop sending money home to her husband thereby ease poverty burden on mum and her son
- Mum's education would be re-instated for the next academic year.

**This case brings with it very serious issues**

**Take this case for instance:**

**Proof of Paternity for father's responsibility**

**Case 18 of 18 cases**

This case was referred to our project two years ago by SURE START. Mum did not want to engage at the time but then, two years later she called to say she needs support to deal with the many problems.

Mum visited our office to discuss the problem all of which centred around the need for her husband's refusal to pay maintenance for her children.

### **Findings**

Mum had been a victim of domestic violence and deceit by her husband.

### **DNA test to determine children's paternity**

Our project informed mum that there a need to engage her husband in finding a solution for her and the children.

A letter was written to the husband who responded promptly to congratulate our project for the effort to reconcile fathers with their children.

Dad said however, that he did not have any problem caring for his children provided he knows which of his wife's children are his. **Mum accepted DNA testing.**

Our project referred mum to a firm of solicitors to execute this procedure which would need to go through the Court system.

We recognise that the outcome of the DNA test could represent further challenge for our project as this family will be requiring sensitive support.

Our project aims to continue to work with other agencies to deliver high quality services to the African community.

For African parents, our children are our futures, a future that can only be secured through initiatives to empower the parents so that they are better able to nurture, protect and support our new citizens for greater heights.

Homelessness and Poverty In London  
Expression of gratitude  
Case 19

An elderly woman was referred to our project from within the community when she decided she could no longer sleep rough. Her dwelling was repossessed a year ago and since then she lived rough although she continued to support the community with Christian services. She never sought paid employment although a graduate.

Our project supported this woman appropriately

She wrote thus in gratitude: -

“Aunty Alice / YOU ARE BLESSED.

Am writing to acknowledge and appreciate your excellent performance during my affliction period.

I thank your moral, emotional and above all your spiritual support. The good Lord will continue to encourage and support you in all ways in Jesus name. Amen.

“I pray the Lord God Almighty will continue to prosper you in all your programmes particularly I the Women Of Africa (WOA) entrusted into your care in Jesus name. Amen.

Please, extend the same appreciation to the entire staff that performed in all the documents for my apartment.

YOU ARE BLESSED AND HIGHLY FAVOURED.

“Thanks be to God. I have got a flat, and a new job as so and so as a so and so”.

THANKS very much GOD BLESS YOU WITH ALL MY HEART. Signed:

Reverend so and so”

Employment Dispute  
Our Intervention/Expression of Gratitude  
Case 20

Our project was contacted through our Website requesting a phone call back. We responded promptly and an appointment was made for the lady to come to the office for a support session.

Through our support, our lady better understood the issues being presented by her employer and with our outreach support, the emotional burden borne out of suspicion and distrust was lifted.

Our lady sent us a card as follows:-

“To Alice Ukoko A True woman of Africa”

“This is to say how significant you have been. I sought support at a very low time in my life and you dramatically raised me up with your amazing personality and acumen. No amount of money can repay this impact. Your reward is in Heaven. I will always appreciate your kindness”

Signed so and so.

The Launched of African Women’s Week in partnership with Her Excellency Mrs Ellen Johnson – Sirleaf President of Republic of Liberia in London and a Conference on the impact of money remittance to African families living in the UK. (13.3.08)

On 13. 03.08, our project launched African Women’s Week in partnership with the President of the Republic of Liberia H E Mrs Ellen Johnson- Sirleaf in London.

The event that was hosted by Deputy Mayor of Southwark (2007 – 2008) Cllr. Mackie Sheik was attended by High Commissioners/Ambassadors of African countries including Eritrea; Egypt; Liberia; Nigeria; South Africa and the Sudan.

Also in attendance were

The Minister for Women Rt. Hon. Harriet Harman QC MP and Deputy Leader of the Labour Party was represented by Valarie Shawcross Member of London Assembly.

Rt. Hon. Simon Hughes MP and President of the Liberal Democrat Party Other high profile participants attended and contributed to the highly successful event.

Our project is highly grateful to Allison Drew Phd who chaired the Conference and Deputy Chair of the board of Trustee of our project.

Dr. Dele Olajide of the Maudsley Hospital in South East London informed the Conference of the high number of Africans with mental health problems in London.

Rev. Dr. Carrie Pemberton talked about International Trafficking

Our Project is grateful to all the speaker and participants of this historic event in London.

Our Gratitude to the following:

❖ London Councils

- ❖ Deputy Mayor of Southwark Cllr. Mackie Sheik (2007-2008)
- ❖ Southwark Children and Adolescents Mental Health Services
- ❖ Brunel University
- ❖ Trident and London schools
- ❖ Volunteers

Our project is grateful to London Government for the grant we received over six years. Without which, it would have been impossible for our project to survive and continue to provide first class cultural support to members of the African community in London.

The Southwark Children and Adolescents Mental health Services gave our project a one-off grant towards our office rent. Our project is grateful for this and looks forward to continued support from them.

The placement of students for work placement ensured that our project has high quality volunteers to provide the much needed services to African families across London.

Our project continues to take work placements from schools across London through Trident an arm of the Metropolitan Police Service. This partnership will continue to be vital to our service as it provides our project the opportunity of working with this age group who constantly give us an insight into the world of schools across London.

Compiled and reviewed on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2008

Alice Ukoko  
(CEO)