Kyra Ishaq Chronology

Khyra Ishaq died at her home in the Handsworth area of Birmingham in May 2008, following months of neglect and physical abuse. She died as a result of severe malnutrition. Her mother Angela Gordon, 35, and ex-partner Junaid Abuhamza, 31, were jailed in 2010 for her manslaughter.

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| March 2006 | Three attempts were made by members of the public to share their concerns, one by a telephone call, the second by a referral in person at a children's social care office. The information resulted in no further action. These were not progressed due to failures of paperwork to reach the correct departments, failure to follow safeguarding procedures and to conduct thorough checks prior to case closure. This was clearly a challenging time within the household. Adult relationships presented as extremely fragile, domestic abuse was alleged and reported to the police and also to the family GP, who despite evidence provided by the mother, that the father presented a safeguarding risk to the children, did not follow prescribed procedures by informing Children’s Social Care, instead encouraging the mother to do this herself. |
| March 2007 | The issue of food first appears on professional records following a handwritten letter from the mother to one school and a face-to-face meeting at another to discuss the children's eating habits. This includes a suggestion from the mother that Kyra was stealing food from other children whilst in school, a situation of which the school at that time were unaware. |
| September 2007 | Junaid Abuhamza, the mother's partner, was living in the family household at the time of the child's death. Available evidence suggests he moved into the household around September 2007. From information provided by the mother and evidence supplied within the criminal trial, changes in attitudes and routines became noticeable from September 2007, placing the adult male in a position to exercise considerable influence on the family, including, diet, feeding routines and discipline of the children. Prior to the adult male's links with the mother, she had been seen by professionals who knew her as an engaged and protective mother of the children.Junaid Abuhamza’s childhood is regarded traumatic. When three, a sibling aged six months, died as a result of cot death. Two years later another three year old sibling, died following significant trauma, after being hit by their father in the stomach as a form of “discipline” whilst being toilet trained. His father was convicted of manslaughter and imprisoned for seven years. He was seen as a strict disciplinarian with rigidity and high, unrealistic expectations. The impact upon this man’s development, from these early traumas and his views on discipline and parenting, were unknown prior to criminal proceedings. He was briefly in receipt of adult mental health services during 2001. Whilst he did not provide a full diagnosable history, he did give the Psychiatrist sufficient evidence to strongly suspect a low grade psychotic illness. He was not compliant with attempts to provide medication and this was communicated to his GP.  |
| October and December 2007 | Between October and December 2007 several school appointments were missed by both parents. Although they were living separately at this time, their previous commitment to engaging with schools to discuss their children’s progress had existed. Failure to attend presented a change of behaviour. |
|  | It is not until some nine months later, during December 2007, that professionals again began to record issues around food. Clear evidence of the child stealing food from other children existed and other siblings within the family were indicating obsessive traits towards food and feeding. What we now know, is that the mother was struggling to address her own weight at that time, which was causing her health problems. Evidence from legal proceedings indicate that a regime to enable her to lose weight, was also applied inappropriately to the children’s food intake. |
| December 2007 | Following changes to the mother's behaviour, deteriorating relationships with schools, increased aggression to and reduced co-operation with all professionals, the child and some siblings were removed from state education and a clear statement issued by the mother of her intention to educate them at home.Note : The responsibility for a child’s education rests with parents. In England, education is compulsory, but school is not. The legislation that enabled the mother’s action is contained within S7 of the Education Act 1996, supported by additional guidance within the Elective Home Education Guidelines for Local Authorities 2007. On this occasion, the legislative framework contributed to the unintended outcome of isolating some children within a home environment and restricted access to those children by professional agencies, effectively removing any oversight of their welfare or development |
| December 2007 | The safe-and-well check conducted by the police in response to a professional request from the school, appears to have hardened the mother's resistance to further professional intervention.Khyra had been removed from school in December 2007 and subjected to a punishment regime which included standing outside in the cold for long periods, having cold water poured over her and being beaten with a bamboo cane.School staff attempted to communicate professional concerns on several occasions to Children’s Social Care, but were not properly heard. Concerns were inaccurately recorded initially and the focus placed upon attendance issues, as opposed to mother’s changed behaviour, increased aggression to professionals and the children’s obsession with food. Recommendations by Children’s Social Care for school to conduct an assessment using the agreed Common Assessment Framework and to request a police safe & well check were inappropriate given the information provided. |
|  | The review calls for changes to the law to ensure that social services speak to children to assess whether home education is in their interests, as well as their parents. The review found Gordon had become increasingly aggressive towards her children's teachers when she removed Khyra and some of her siblings from school in December 2007. Gordon wrote to authorities to tell them that she wanted to educate her children at home. Birmingham city council's education welfare service – known as the Education Otherwise team – visited Gordon with a social worker to assess whether she was fit to home-educate her children. The serious case review found the welfare worker used a "tick-box" approach for this assessment. The welfare worker did not ask to see examples of the kinds of lessons Khyra would be taught or inquire into how many hours of education Gordon's children would receive each week. At no point did the welfare worker request to see Khyra or her siblings. Nonetheless, the welfare worker concluded that Gordon was fit to home-educate her children**6 December 2007** Khyra's mother, Angela Gordon, withdraws her from primary school, where she had a perfect attendance record.**19 December** The deputy headteacher contacts the [children's services department at Birmingham city council](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2008/may/23/ukcrime.childprotection) to raise concerns about Khyra's welfare. The teacher and a colleague later visit Khyra's home but are not allowed in. |
|  | **28 January 2008** Khyra's school again contacts social services to raise concerns about whether Gordon is able to meet her daughter's educational needs by home teaching. Social worker Ranjit Mann visits the house but leaves after 10-15 minutes as nobody answers the door |
|  | **29-30 January** Gordon contacts Mann by phone, leaving a message, but later refuses to arrange for the social worker to visit |
|  | **8 February** Educational social worker Richard Lewis and council mentor Irving Horne visit the home to offer advice on home schooling. Neither official sees any children. |
|  | **21 February** Social workers Sanya Scott and Anne Gondo pay a joint, pre-arranged visit to the family home but are refused entry. The women decide that they have no concerns for Khyra after she is brought to meet them at the front door |
|  | **8 March** Amandeep Kaur, who lived nearby, sees Khyra dressed in underwear in the back garden of her home. She was later to tell police that it was a cold morning and the "abnormally thin" child was whimpering. |
| Feb 2008 | Education Otherwise provides advice, support and assessment to parents who have elected to educate their children at home. The lack of a robust and rigorous process by Education Otherwise, during February 2008, to assess the capability of adults within this household to provide effective home education, coupled with the absence of any risk-assessment process to address safeguarding concerns previously communicated by education welfare, must be viewed as a significant failure. School staff attempted to communicate professional concerns on several occasions to children's social care, but were not properly heard. Concerns were inaccurately recorded initially and the focus placed upon attendance issues, as opposed to mother's changed behaviour, increased aggression to professionals and the children's obsession with food |
|  | Other authorities held "great store" by the welfare worker's assessment, the review found, and this led to a catalogue of missed opportunities to spot neglect and abuse in the home. |
| Feb 2008 | The initial assessment by Children’s Social Care in February 2008 was not completed. As a result, Children’s Social Care failed to accurately assess the risks posed to children within the family. Adult resistance to professional intervention, doorstep conversations, the mother’s sound knowledge of home education legislation and a hostile and aggressive approach, influenced and affected professional actions, preventing a full understanding of conditions within the home and seemed to render professionals impotent, thereby directing the focus away from the welfare of the children. Adults within the household fully controlled, monitored and limited access to the children and through their behaviours and attitudes frustrated a thorough analysis and assessment of the issues. These actions reinforced a power imbalance that undermined the rights, welfare and protection of the children who were at that time educated at home. A complaint of harassment by Gordon against a social worker who visited their home in February 2008 generated a reluctance to complete an assessment "for fear of wider repercussions within the complaints process". Gordon, 35, proved extraordinarily adept at swatting aside attempts by professionals to intervene in her chaotic family life. At times she would threaten physical violence, at other times threaten legal action, or accuse them of racism or harassment. She ruthlessly exploited safeguarders' ignorance of the law on home schooling and kept them constantly on the back foot. |
|  | On one occasion, in February 2008, a social worker visited the family home to attempt an assessment. The social worker was not allowed into the home but after refusing to leave was eventually given brief doorstep contact with some of the children. "By the time the senior practitioner returned to the office," noted the review, "a complaint had already been made by [Gordon] against the social worker of harassment." An agreed follow-up visit the next day did not go ahead as a result of the complaint. |
|  | Between 1998 and 2008 the children missed a minimum of 129 professional appointments. Undoubtedly, with a family of six children, some of whom had statements of special educational need, there are particular pressures and stresses for parents and a degree of failed appointments would be expected, particularly, when the mother was operating as a single parent for periods of time. However, the pattern of failed appointments escalated dramatically during 2007 as relationships with professionals deteriorated. The response to these failures within the agencies was not always actively addressed, or the significance fully understood and therefore not communicated with partner agencies. Whilst a number of agencies and individuals sought to deliver effective services to the child and her family, there were others who lost sight of the child and focussed instead upon the rights of the adults, the adult’s behaviours and the potential impact for themselves as professionals.  |
| May 2008 | A postmortem on Khyra found 60 marks, 34 of which could have happened a week before her death. Eight were consistent with being struck by a cane.There were echoes of the death of Victoria Climbié, who was abused by an aunt, before she died in Haringey, north London, 10 years ago. |
| 17 May 2008 | Kyra's mother made a 999 telephone call requesting an ambulance because of serious concerns over this child's health. An ambulance crew found the child lying on a mattress in an upstairs bedroom. Death was pronounced at 06.25am.The cause of death is recorded as bronchial pneumonia and septicaemia with focal bacterial meningitis. The child's weight at death had fallen below the 0.4th centile, with a body mass index of 10.7, which was so low that it could not be plotted on a body mass index chart. The child was described as extremely malnourished with severe wasting.Evidence clearly indicates that severe malnutrition was entirely due to an inadequate intake of food and that there was significant starvation over a period of several months. All of the surviving siblings were malnourished to a greater or lesser extent and all had specific nutrient deficiencies. |

The review suggested that Gordon's intimidatory behaviour did not excuse professionals' missed opportunities to intervene, but it noted: "Dealing with safeguarding inquiries and assessments can be a stressful process for workers, particularly when attempting to undertake work with aggressive and highly resistant adults." Although Gordon's life was far from straightforward, the review noted that before her relationship with her partner, Junaid Abuhamza, she had been known to professionals as "an engaged and protective mother of the children". Teachers considered her a "powerful personality" but had never previously found her threatening or violent. But the review suggested that under Abuhamza's controlling and irrational influence her behaviour changed. She became aggressive, obstructive towards teachers and distrusting of other professionals.