

Hundreds protest over drowning of refugee schoolgirl in UK

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17 July 2019

The death of Shukri Yahya Abdi, a 12-year-old Somali refugee, has provoked outrage among family and friends in Bury, Greater Manchester. A protest outside Broad Oak Sports College, where Shukri was a pupil, was held after Shukri's funeral on July 5.

Hundreds attended the protest led by her school friends, some holding placards saying, "Shukri's Life Matters," demanding justice and urging people not to forget her name. Many chanted, "We want Justice! Justice for Shukri!"

Shukri's body was found in the River Irwell after a police search on June 27. Her mother, Zamzam Ture, raised the alarm when Shukri did not come home from school. Zamzam has explained she has no idea why her daughter was in the water as she could not swim. The spot where she is believed to have entered the water is fast flowing and near a weir. In parts, the water is 20 foot deep.

Tensions in the area escalated when police announced they were not treating Shukri's death as suspicious. They described the death as "an incredibly tragic incident" despite Twitter posts claiming that Shukri was taken to the river and pushed in by two "friends."

Shukri only came to the UK from Somalia last year. Her mother fled the decade-long civil war in Somalia and lived in a camp in Kenya prior to arriving in Bury. Her family claims she was badly bullied for over a year and that the school had not taken the complaints seriously.

Shukri's mother gave an interview to AbdiTV on July 2, explaining the events leading up to her daughter's death. "The police said, 'your daughter died in an accident, she was playing with other kids, she died there.' The other kids were not wet or harmed. So, it was a denial. The police haven't shown us any evidence. I have no proof of what happened. Even the

man who was the witness (the police said he) was drunk.

"The school have done nothing. The school where my daughter was bullied, that I had been complaining to forever. Now they've said I never complained." Zamzam said she "went to the school many times" and asked that those bullying Shukri be disciplined. Clearly worried that her daughter would be attacked on the way home, Zamzam had asked the school to "keep her behind and I would pick her up."

Zamzam explained, "I want to see justice. If the rights we came to the country for exist, I want something done." At Friday's protest outside the school, family member Saynab Hareed explained that Shukri's teachers had sometimes dropped her home from school out of fears for her safety.

The school has launched an internal inquiry into the family's allegations of bullying against Shukri. They have promised to share the inquiry's findings with the family and are reviewing the school's anti-bullying policies. The school is part of a newly founded academy trust which takes children from east Bury and Rochdale.

In the area surrounding the school, one third of all children are living in poverty, in families whose income is less than 60 percent of the national median income. This figure is nearly double the national average.

Last year, OFSTED (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills) graded the school "inadequate" on all levels, including poor behaviour. A small number of pupils told inspectors that bullying was an issue for them.

Broad Oaks has a disadvantaged intake with a mobile population and one-quarter of families do not speak English as a first language. Students receiving "pupil premium" funding based on their eligibility for free

school meals is double the national figure as is the proportion of students with special educational needs or disabilities. Rather than address the root causes of such disadvantage, the school was closed and merged with two other schools to form the Oak Learning Partnership Multi Academy Trust.

The school's website details its behaviour policy, which is seventeen-pages long, with consequences for many levels of disruption. However, the bullying policy has not been updated since 2017–18, i.e., since before the schools merged.

Shukri's death has evoked an outpouring of support for the family. More than 76,000 people have signed an online petition addressed to Bury Labour Party MP James Frith and the Local Education Authority calling for an investigation.

The petition states: "We the undersigned community of Bury, Lancashire and all communities across the UK demand James Frith MP and the Local Education Authority of Bury, Lancashire to investigate Broad Oak High School for potential negligence and a potential breach of its duty of care towards its pupils in light of accusations of failure to address incidents of bullying."

It continues: "This petition comes in light of the tragic death of 12 year old Shukri Yahya Abdi, a Somali refugee who came to the UK alongside her mother and siblings for a better quality of life and safety and instead was a victim of bullying at the above named school, where inaction and potential failures to protect this student by staff may have inadvertently led to her death last week.

"We advise everyone across the UK to sign this petition as it affects every parent of every child. We hand over responsibility of our children 7 hours a day, 5 days a week the moment we leave them at the school gates. We therefore should expect a level of duty of care to be observed by those whose care they are under."

Mustaf Omar Mohamed, Shukri's cousin, refutes the police claim that her death was a tragic accident, telling Muslim news site 5Pillars, "We don't believe it was an accident, we believe there is more to this story and we don't believe we are getting the answers and support we deserve from the police and the school.

"We know that Shukri was being bullied and so do the school and the police. It was name-calling and physical. She was an easy target and her mum was in

the process of taking her out of the school. We want a proper investigation. We want them to be fully honest about everything that led up to this incident. We don't feel we're getting this cooperation at the moment."

Shukri's aunt, Anab Ture, told the *Guardian* her niece was a "good girl" who helped her mother to look after her four younger siblings. "She wanted to become a doctor, she loved helping people."

Greater Manchester Police issued another statement last week saying that Shukri's death was a tragic accident. An inquest into Shukri's death opened on July 9 amid police calls for calm but has been adjourned until December 9.



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