Good morning and thank you for inviting me to speak. I first came to this conference in 2002 to listen to Earl Howe and Charles Pragnell, speaking on the issue of False Allegations of Child Abuse. Since then Earl Howe, Shadow Health spokesperson in the House of Lords, has done more than any other UK politician to exert appropriate pressure in the right places. I am proud to remember that he told this UCAFAA audience that he was first alerted to what he called “the parallel world” of False Accusations by a woman in North London. I knew from the detail that he meant me.

Charles Pragnell is now in Australia but sends his greetings to the conference and wishes he could be here with us today. He was involved with the unravelling of the Cleveland Child Abuse scandal, and has told me that False Accusations of child sex abuse in Cleveland had been going on for years, but were only publicly exposed when the child abuse activists became over confident and had a go at the middle classes. He draws parallels with the roles of Steve and Sally Clark and my husband and me in the exposure of the MSBP scandal.

In the October 2001 House of Lords debate on False Accusation of Child Abuse, the Lib Dem Health spokesperson, Lord Clement Jones, spoke of some people likening the accusations of MSBP to a new Salem and to the contents of Arthur Millers Crucible. As far as I know the first people who shared this idea with Lord Clement Jones were my husband and me, in a meeting suggested by MEP Baroness Sara Ludford who knew my husband. I will come back to Miller’s Crucible later.

My original title for this address concerned the MSBP case reviews but as the Local Authorities were left to review their own actions and turkeys don’t vote for an early Christmas there is little to report. This is partly because of failed Local
Authority complaints procedures which, as I will illustrate later from personal experience, do not work where accusation of MSBP is concerned.

The Government insists that Local Authority complaints procedures are in place. They do not seem to understand that self review fails to uncover detail of content. By considering process only these complaints procedures miss the point and are used to hide all kinds of errors and omissions. When families try to complain to members of Parliament they are frequently dismissed because the Local Authorities shelter safely behind complaints procedures, as proof of supposed innocence. I believe that there are plans to revise complaints procedures but I am not au fait with these.

One important reason for the failure of Local Authorities to find cases for review is the selective information collected and selective filing of documents, by social services departments involved in child protection inquiries. In our case a head-teacher declared particular hospital visits as “unauthorised absence” despite NHS referral and funding. The social worker therefore declared information from the relevant Professor of medicine as “inadmissible evidence”.

Parents have not come forward to demand reviews because they have been silenced by the draconian restrictions of the family courts or because they are afraid that sticking their heads over the parapet would further erode their already fragile contact arrangements with their stolen children. The press are frustrated by what they perceive as a lack of parental initiative and with no available personal interest stories of failed or refused reviews they have been unable to exert the necessary pressure on government.

I hope to concentrate on and illustrate the way in which two government edicts – the SEN Assessment and Tribunal Process and the Department of Health Guidelines on MSBP, or as they call it Fictitious and Induced Illness in Children, create the environment in which False Allegations proliferate and to flag up the dangers of the post-Climbie computerisation of records.

The psychologist and author Lisa Blakemore Brown has spoken of False Allegations growing from a “first gossamer breath”. I haven’t got a lot of time but I think it is relevant to give you the bones of our family story to illustrate the
influence of a GP’s “gossamer breath” and failures in the SEN Assessment process.

I have a teaching qualification and a postgraduate diploma in child development and once had a fairly high profile career in children’s work. 25 years ago Woman’s Own magazine put me on its front cover as “the girl who cares for latchkey kids”. On behalf of the UK Association for International Year of the Child I coordinated the National campaign for increased and improved after school and holiday provision.

I married late and our son was born in 1989. He has Asperger’s Syndrome but we were unable to get a proper diagnosis until he was 12 years old. He also suffers from CFS/ME. His complex educational and medical needs never allowed me to pick up the threads of my career and I have spent most of the last 15 and a half years as carer as well as parent.

Our daughter, now 10, also falls into the category recently described by Scottish Baroness Veronica Linklater as “educationally fragile”. She was speaking of bright and talented children, who have special educational and medical needs, which make them unable to cope with the pressures of large mainstream schools. Mark Haddon’s award winning novel “The Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time” describes this response to busy places as being like a an overloaded computer needing to press CTRL/ALT/DEL to shut down programmes and reboot.

When our son was three and joined a playgroup I could no longer convince myself that everything was ok with him and asked my GP for a referral to the local Child and Adolescent Psychiatrist. Unbeknown to me her referral letter suggested that our son’s problems lay in my need for attention. This was our first “gossamer breath”. For the next six years this letter thwarted our every attempt to get medical or educational assessment or support for our son.

In 1998 our son’s bilateral pneumonia and pleurisy were missed by GPs who believed him to be a “snotty nosed kid” with an over- anxious mother.

In 1999 we took the Local Education Authority to a Special Educational Needs Tribunal to ask for a Statutory Assessment of our son’s difficulties. The LEA
Educational Psychologist, convinced the LEA Tribunal Officer that she was protecting our son from my potential abuse, by blocking medical reports and a diagnosis of his Dyslexia. The Tribunal officer assisted the Educational Psychologist in her tactics. We failed at Tribunal because we lacked the evidence contained in the blocked reports. A senior local councillor reported our experiences to the chief executive of our Local Council who was not pleased as he did not consider this to be in the spirit of Tribunal or the best interests of the child.

The educational psychologist used our failure at Tribunal as supposed evidence of my attempt to draw attention to myself by exaggerating or fantasising about our son’s problems. She linked up with a head-teacher who didn't like our son’s effect on her attendance statistics and the GP who was embarrassed that she had missed the pneumonia and feared a possible claim for medical negligence.

They conspired to accuse me of causing “significant harm” to our son by seeking unnecessary medical and educational tests. Both children were placed on the “At Risk” register until our MP and the Leader of the Lib Dem group on the hung council both intervened on our behalf. I determined to fight to clear my name and ensure that other families were spared similar or worse trauma, often triggered by failures in SEN assessment and support.

A 1979 report by Baroness Mary Warnock, on integration of SEN children into mainstream schools, formed the basis of the 1981 Education Act. “The road to hell is paved with good intentions” and Lady Warnock said recently (TES 19 09 03) “It has ceased to be about what the child needs and has just become a battle for resources”. She spoke of the huge amounts of money wasted on litigation over Statements “This is what has been so tragic. It’s a huge industry, it’s wasteful and unproductive.” She suggested that the changes had left some children worse off than 26 years ago.

I am hearing increasing numbers of stories, like our own, where schools and education authorities make social services referrals on the basis of supposed parental harm or fantasy, instead of assessing and supporting children with special educational needs.
Until recently I thought our own family story was history but it has now come back to haunt us because we have again exercised our right to use the SEN Tribunal which stemmed from the 1981 Act. To the utter amazement of those who submitted reports to her Statutory Assessment of Special Educational Need our LEA has refused to give our daughter an SEN Statement. Without a Statement she has no access to resources for vital computer equipment and it is not possible to place her in a small school. She can’t cope with busy crowded places and is close to secondary transfer. All our LEA secondary schools are absolutely massive.

We discovered to our horror that the LEA had passed our papers to their same Tribunal officer who in 1999 had supposedly protected our son by blocking medical reports at his Tribunal. This officer’s actions had helped precipitate our traumatic Child Protection fiasco and had delayed our son’s Statutory Assessment of Educational Need and diagnosis of his Asperger’s syndrome for 3 years. Her actions had caused him immense social and educational damage.

I objected to this officer’s involvement in our daughter’s case but my objections were ignored. The involvement of this woman felt to me like the reopening of an old and painful wound. I then discovered that yet more papers had been sent to her. This infuriated me and I felt as if someone had poured acid into the open wound, so I accused the LEA of a breach of trust.

They looked out old files and discovered that we had complained about the 1999 SEN Tribunal and that their complaints process had absolved the officer of guilt.

LEA complaints procedures do not work in False Accusation of MSBP. Meadow, Southall and their supporters have defined “complaining” as a “symptom” of the supposed illness. Complaints procedures invariably whitewash the actions of MSBP accusers as they are acting within the Department of Health Guidelines, to which I will return. The LEA therefore backed their own findings, supported the officer and dredged up words from the 1999 files to describe me as offensive, inappropriate and malicious and to restrict my access to those I need to deal with on a routine basis.
That’s more than enough about my family but I hope it serves as illustration of some of the wider points.

The inability through ignorance, inertia or lack of resources of schools to deal with children with conditions such as Dyslexia and Dyspraxia, ADD and ADHD, Asperger’s syndrome and other Autistic Spectrum disorders, ME or chronic fatigue syndrome, epilepsy, diabetes, elective mutism, school phobia and other subtle difficulties and rare genetic disorders causes mayhem for these children and their families. Baroness Linklater pointed out in a recent address to the Scottish Liberal Club that whilst these children’s needs can often be met in primary schools, large secondary schools frequently precipitate educational failure and social misery for them.

Cash strapped Local Education Authorities, even in Conservative areas such as my own, repeat David Blunkett’s mantra of integration, integration, integration. An educational psychologist from a neighbouring borough said to me a few days ago “they’ve all been on their courses in new Labour spin and don’t even look at the problems they cause for families”.

Yes, of course, some disabled children SHOULD have a right to be integrated in mainstream schools, if that is their choice, but equally Asperger’s children who can’t face crowded social situations such as public transport, shopping malls, theatre foyers or football stadia should not be forced to face the daily terror of 1500 or more children changing classrooms simultaneously or fighting for a place in a seemingly endless lunch queue in an impossibly noisy dining hall or be expected to undertake physical education in large echoey sports halls that hurt their hyper-sensitive ears. Integration works well for some disabled children, especially those with obvious physical difficulties, but it is often impossible for those with neurophysiological disorders. The ones that Lady Linklater has so aptly termed “Educationally Fragile” and Mark Haddon has described as needing to constantly reboot their overloaded internal hard drives.

If we had more time I would love to give illustrations of other families and the failure of the SEN Assessment system but I must move on to the even more important issue of the Department of Health Guidelines on Fictitious and Induced Illness in Children. Once again I am going to intertwine this with my own, hopefully illustrative, personal account of events.
BBC R4 “Woman’s Hour” have recently been asking for suggestions of life changing novels. Mine has to be Margaret Atwood’s “Surfacing”. The final chapter begins “This above all, to refuse to be a victim.”

When our son was born I thought that I had retired from National Voluntary Organisations, politics and pressure groups to become a suburban mother; but with two educationally fragile children I had inadvertently assumed victim status and mentality. Charles Pragnell told me that the way out of depression was to fight back.

In the early hours of Monday May 8 2000 I decided it was time for action. As Margaret Atwood puts it in “Surfacing” you reach a point where “withdrawing is no longer possible”. She speaks of “dressing clumsily” to re-enter a world left behind.

I knew exactly what she meant as I got up and faced the computer. I found the e-mail addresses of every BBC News and current affairs programme and drew their attention to that day’s release of the report by Professor Rod Griffiths into alleged malpractice in the North Staffordshire NHS Trust. I believed and hoped that Professor Griffiths would also report on Professor David Southall’s work as an expert witness in the diagnosis and prosecution of parents he believed were suffering from “Munchausen’s Syndrome by Proxy”.

I caught the train to Birmingham and headed for the Department of Health. I was profoundly disappointed by the paucity of the MSBP section of the Griffith’s report. I knew he had collected sufficient evidence for something much more comprehensive. However he did suggest that the Government should undertake a multi disciplinary review of the MSBP issue. That night, on the BBC’s “Newsnight”, Kirsty Wark reported a Government undertaking to instigate this proposed review and this was optimistically repeated in several National Newspapers on the following day. The expectation was of an inquiry to determine whether or not the MSBP diagnosis was valid.

Whilst I was in Birmingham the BBC’s “Home Truths” rang me on the mobile and a few days later my husband and I found ourselves at Broadcasting House, interviewed about our story by the celebrated children’s author Michael Rosen as
the now sadly deceased John Peel was on holiday. It was transmitted on 13th and 15th May 2000.

On the 17th May my neighbour printed copies of the transcript of our “Home Truths” interview, I wrote a cover letter and my husband stuffed them into envelopes addressed to every relevant politician and public figure we could think of. This was the now infamous letter which Earl Howe spoke of here in 2002 and which John Ungoed Thomas in the Sunday Times of 25 January 2004 used to force the Government to admit that Harriet Harman, Margaret Hodge and others had known about problems with the MSBP diagnosis since at least May 2000, and not just since the Sally Clark appeal as they seemed to want us to think. The Conservative MP Tim Loughton has since tabled a Parliamentary question about my “Home Truths” letter forcing, on 23 February 2004, a Government admission in Hansard as well as in the newspapers.

Going back to the summer of 2000. In the wake of the Griffiths report many significant opponents of the MSBP phenomenon entered into correspondence with John Hutton, the Health Minister responsible, about the expected post Griffith’s review of MSBP. Hutton had already made it clear in the Commons in December 1999 that he had been taken in by Meadow and Southall so he was hardly the person to exercise the balanced judgement called for in the Griffiths Report.

At about this time, Charles Pragnell, Lisa Blakemore Brown and I first met with Earl Howe and with the former Attorney General Sir Nicholas Lyell QC MP. I had known Nick Lyell when we were both concerned with after school and holiday provision. Following our meeting Nick Lyell also wrote to John Hutton to attempt to clarify the post Griffiths situation. This Hutton, not unlike the other later Hutton, was a master of clever words designed to allow the Government whatever rope it required. Hutton managed by sleight of hand to change the Griffiths suggestion of a multi disciplinary review of MSBP into a working party to write guidelines to enable social services departments and others to identify parents and carers supposedly suffering from MSBP, or as they had cleverly re-named it Fictitious and Induced Illness in Children. Anyone reading the Griffiths report and the various letters from John Hutton to Nick Lyell and others will recognise that spin was alive and well in Westminster in the year 2000.
The Government acknowledges the need for clear interagency guidelines for professionals to follow when MSPB is suspected. Therefore a multi-disciplinary working party is being convened to draw up such guidelines within the framework of Working Together to Safeguard Children - a guide to inter-agency working to safeguard and promote the welfare of children published by my Department in December 1999.

Sir Nicholas Lyell, who was an MP, a QC and a former Tory Attorney General, also shared his concerns with the office of the Lord Chancellor. I don’t think he even got a reply. The level of arrogance from this Government was extreme.

It appears that someone was seconded from one of the major children’s charities to write the FII guidelines and that all those invited to contribute were disciples of Meadow and Southall. The Children’s Minister at the time was Beverley Hughes who later resigned over immigration issues. I understand that Hughes, a former probation officer and social work lecturer, has been associated with promoting belief in the existence of organised ritual abuse. Maybe she was also receptive to the views of Meadow and Southall, possibly believing these to be in the best interests of children?

Draft guidelines on the identification of parents and carers supposedly guilty of inventing or inducing their children’s illnesses were released in 2001. They read like the gospel according to Saint Roy and Saint David. My husband likened them to the medieval Maleus Maleficarum which was used to hunt out and prosecute supposed witches.

This brings me to Arthur Miller’s “Crucible” which was written in the post-war period when fear of global Communist expansion reached hysterical proportions and a search began for the enemy within. U.S Senator Joseph McCarthy instituted the hearings of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. Hollywood was decimated as actors, writers and directors were accused of communism and found themselves unable to work. Arthur Miller drew attention to the crusade against suspected Communist sympathisers through his masterpiece “The Crucible”. It tells the story of the New England witch hunts of the late seventeenth century. The context in which these witch-hunts took place had been exported with the Pilgrim Fathers from Britain, where a century earlier the influence of the
Maleus Maleficarum had devastated communities caught up in the web of fear and false accusation.

In the McCarthy era, it was impossible to speak out in support of those falsely accused, for fear of being oneself accused of having communist sympathies. It was only when the former Allied Supreme Commander, General Eisenhower became President of the United States that someone was able to point out that the Emperor had no clothes. Eisenhower’s military credibility gave him the persuasive authority to be taken seriously. Eisenhower denounced McCarthy and at long last people were able to speak common sense without fear of recrimination. The whole house of cards came tumbling down.

To date it has not been possible to find anyone with sufficient persuasive authority to point out the ridiculous nature of many of the false accusations of child abuse in the UK and abroad where fear has been whipped up and the gospel according to Saints Roy and David has become government policy. Most people in public life are too afraid of being branded as potential child abusers or apologists if they speak out against the MSBP myth. The churches who should have taken up the search for truth have been contaminated by stories of vicars behaving badly and have therefore been unable to use their imperium.

Following my initial contact with Earl Howe and the subsequent meeting between Earl Howe, Nick Lyell, Charles Pragnell, Lisa Blakemore Brown and me there was a sense of needing a political focus to bring the question of false allegation of Child Abuse to the attention of Parliament. My husband and I then met with Lord Clement Jones who then met with Earl Howe. These two front bench Health Spokespersons of the two major opposition parties [Earl Howe and Lord Clement Jones] and alighted on the idea of a Lords Debate on False Accusation of Child Abuse to be opened by Earl Howe and summed up by Lord Clement Jones. A provisional date was arranged but had to be postponed because of mad cow disease. The debate was eventually set for 17 October 2001 which was very timely as it was a few weeks before the closing date for evidence and comment concerning the draft guidelines on Fictitious and Induced Illness in Children.

In the run up to the Lords debate there was a flurry of activity. Earl Howe met Lord Hunt of Kings Heath of the Department of Health who would reply to the debate
for the Government. Lord Hunt was flanked by key civil servants. Earl Howe presented Lord Hunt with a compelling dossier of case histories and other information questioning or disproving the hypotheses of Meadow and Southall and suggesting that the proposed guidelines on FII were entirely inappropriate. He came away with the impression that this was the first time that key civil servants had heard anything contrary to the Meadow/Southall view.

Earlier in that same summer I had written to Beverley Hughes and to Harriet Harman requesting a meeting to discuss MSBP. I had known and worked with Harriet on the issue of after school and holiday provision. My letter was ignored until after Earl Howe’s meeting with Lord Hunt.

Suddenly I was summoned to the Department of Health. I took Lisa Blakemore Brown and my husband with me. We met with two of the same civil servants who had flanked Lord Hunt at his meeting with Earl Howe. They were fascinated by what we were saying and cancelled their next meeting to spend longer with us. I concentrated on the role of voluntary organisations whose propaganda leaflets were causing much confusion by citing as symptoms of supposed Child Abuse many things which could equally be symptoms of Autism, Asperger’s Syndrome, ADD/ADHD, Dyslexia, Dyspraxia, CFS/ME and a whole host of other childhood illnesses or disabilities. I was especially worried about the NSPCC “Full Stop” campaign, the literature of which was a recipe for well meaning school teachers to get the wrong end of the stick and blame parents for undiagnosed neurophysiological illness.

The civil servants were effusive in their thanks and pressed us to contribute written comments on the FII guidelines. This was the first ever focused task for the embryonic organisation “Parents, Professionals and Politicians Protecting Children with Illness and/or Disability”. We submitted a thick lever arch file of compelling evidence from parents and professionals, together with conference speeches, academic theses etc. Some of this is still available on our popular website which had 250 visits this week. Other key professionals including Dr Paul Shattock OBE of Sunderland submitted their separate evidence.

In the 17 October debate Earl Howe and Lord Clement Jones were both magnificent. There were many other excellent speeches most notably from The
Countess of Mar on behalf of children with CFS/ME. Lord Astor of Hever spoke eloquently about children with Autistic Spectrum Disorders and ADD/ADHD from family experience and from his contact with the support organisation ADDISS. Lord Mitchell used the occasion to record the terrifying story of Sally Clark’s false imprisonment in Hansard, where it will remain forever as an indictment of a Government, a Judiciary and a Medical Profession who prefer spin to simple common sense and compassion.

When Lord Hunt replied for the Government we were all pleasantly surprised. He offered to meet Lady Mar and Lord Astor. He promised that speeches made in the debate and documents submitted would be taken into account when the draft guidelines were reviewed prior to publication.

We all went to bed that night with a great sense of achievement. We felt sure that if Lord Hunt kept his promise the Gospel of Saints Roy and David would not after all be issued as a Department of Health Document.

How wrong could we be? Whilst Earl Howe managed to secure a few minor and procedural amendments nothing substantial was changed between the draft guidelines and the guidelines as finally issued. Lord Hunt did not fulfil our expectations. His later resignation from a post he enjoyed at Health, over the principle of the Iraq war, suggests to me that he meant what he said when he said it. I have always wondered if Beverley Hughes or her superior Alan Milburn overruled him.

When Milburn resigned to spend more time with his family at the time of the Trupti Patel trial, some of us wondered if he was getting out of the way to avoid the flack when Meadow and Southall got their come-uppance and his role in promoting their Gospel was exposed. Sadly the media has taken no notice of the guidelines – the media don’t understand and the guidelines don’t have a human interest component to make a media-friendly story. Since Milburn’s return the normally reasonable Steven Twigg has become much more hard-line on unauthorised absence from school, which is particularly difficult for children with undiagnosed illness or unrecognised special educational needs. I foresee disaster ahead.
The Department of Health guidelines define the context in which all accusations of MSBP or FII take place. Social Services Departments, Local Education Authorities, Primary Care Trusts and independent training agencies are still providing in-service training to health and education professionals based on the Guidelines. By re-titling MSBP as FII they have cleverly sidestepped the furore in the wake of the Clark, Patel and Cannings legal cases and continue on the basis of “business as usual”.

The biggest concession which Earl Howe won from Lord Hunt was the removal of the supposed MSBP “profile” from the guidelines but this was a hollow victory as there is nothing to stop this profile being presented at training courses as an inventory of supposed symptoms. The leading lights in the paediatric and social work professions are in complete denial over the Clark, Patel and Canning cases, desperately trying to convince the world that it was all a media plot to discredit Professors Southall and Meadow and the wonderful work they did.

The Patel case post dated the DoH guidelines and would probably never have come to trial if the DoH had properly reviewed the guidelines in the light of the October 01 Lords Debate.

It is my firm belief that until and unless we persuade the media of the fundamental damage perpetuated by these guidelines and thereby force their withdrawal, all our efforts to secure help for families and all proposed reviews of whatever kind will fail. These Department of Health guidelines underpin all policy and practice

It is notable that after the Cannings judgement the NSPCC “full stop” campaign with its confusion of symptoms seemed to disappear. Sadly, now that we are finding that the anti parent view is once again in the ascendancy, it seems to have reared its ugly head once again. The television is now running NSPCC advertisements which say that abused children aren’t able to speak up for themselves. The National Autistic Society could and should borrow the same film footage to explain that Autistic and Asperger’s children can’t speak up for themselves either.

That brings me back full circle as it was my son’s inability to take part in class or group activities that forced me into the parallel world of victims of False
Accusation and drew me from suburban London back into National political
dogfights and frenzied media activity.

The child protection industry is extremely adept at turning disasters into triumphs. They are now using the tragic case of Victoria Climbie, who died as a result of failures in the child protection system, to obtain increased powers and resources and to scare politicians into providing a national computer database of the 13 million children in England and Wales. The implication of setting up such a database is truly horrifying. My daughter saw a report in our local paper that two libraries and a day centre had been closed to help provide 5.5 million pounds towards computerisation of social services children’s databases. She said “that means that until I am 18 everybody concerned with my health or education will know that I was on the Child Protection Register because of my brother. No thanks.” She has since asked if we can go and live in France because “it feels like [she’s] got a criminal record here”.

There appears to be little clear guidance on who will access the information. Every time a child has a problem with school attendance, every time a child is taken to a hospital with a cut or burn or bruise, every time a harassed GP thinks that an anxious mother has made too many visits to the doctor’s surgery, whenever there is mental illness or disability or drug abuse or criminal activity, or alcoholism in the family, the child will be given a ‘Flag’ on the computer database – and only two of these ‘Flags’ will set off a child protection investigation!. The scenario which will ensue is too horrendous to imagine. My daughter has a patchy school attendance through illness, a brother with Asperger’s Syndrome and recently attended casualty after she spilled tomato soup on her hand. By my reckoning she must have three flags already!

It is highly unlikely that a computerised database would have saved Victoria Climbie from the incompetence of child protection professionals and their neglect of her care while they chased innocent children with disabilities. My son recognised television pictures of the Social Services office which failed to save Victoria Climbie as being opposite the shop where we buy our gluten free flour. Some of the dates on which no staff were available to visit Victoria were the same dates as the neighbouring local authority visited us or held meetings in cosy
offices to discuss their fantasies about me and to waste tens of thousands of pounds pursuing us for undiagnosed Asperger’s Syndrome.

In the wake of the success of Mark Haddon’s “Curious Incident of the Dog in the Night Time” there is increased public understanding of Asperger’s Syndrome. I’ve felt increased warmth from people who had previously not understood my family situation. News media including Radio 5 live recently reported on the confusion of symptoms between Asperger’s Syndrome and supposed child abuse. Lord Filkin announced that he would investigate this. I have Earl Howe’s promise that he intends to “keep [Lord Filkin’s] feet to the fire on this”. It may be that a prize winning children’s novel has opened a chink in the defensive dam.

A young writer visited me recently. She was starting out to write a play about a family falsely accused of MSBP but in the course of her research had realised that this wasn’t something small and isolated but was part of a massive whole concerned with spin and cover up and the nanny state and a whole lot more besides.

This is an issue which increasingly affects the whole of society. We can no longer afford to be victims. We have to fight and we have to win. In Unity is strength. We have to fight together.

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