

## **Star's Story**

Star was born on **21st May 2019** and was 16 months old when she was murdered on **22nd September 2020**. Star's mother Frankie Smith was 17 years old when she became pregnant.

Frankie, described as young for her age, had not found school easy; she struggled academically and experienced bullying.

Star's father had been in care and was living in supported accommodation but remained in contact with his parents. He was in regular contact with both a transitions social worker in Adult Social Care and a Personal Adviser from the Leaving Care team.

After her birth, Star moved households frequently and there were times when people other than her mother were looking after her full time. Health visitors and nursery nurses were not aware of the extent of disruption in Star's life and found her to be developing as expected.

Frankie's relationship with Star's father was "on and off" and ended when Star was 4 months old. Arrangements were then made for Star to have regular contact with her father at his parents' home.

Roughly, in October 2019, Frankie Smith and Savannah Brockhill met, Savannah was 26 years old. She had a history of domestic abuse and was subject to a Restraining Order in 2015.

Family and friends report a change in Star after Frankie began her relationship with Savannah. Frankie was seen with bruises, and concerns that Savannah seemed to be controlling her. Other family members are restricted from having contact with Star.

**January 2020** - a friend, who often looked after Star, disclosed to a professional that she is worried about the abuse in Frankie and Savannah's relationship and Savannah's physical chastisement of Star.

Following a written referral, the police made a welfare check and a social worker completed a child and family assessment and undertook a home visit; no child protection concerns are recorded. The main need identified for Star was accommodation for her and Frankie. The case is closed to CSC and a letter was sent to the Housing Department

**Around February 2020**, Frankie asked Star's great grandmother to look after her as she could not cope after Savannah had ended the relationship with her. When Star arrived at her great grandmother's home, she had very bad nappy rash but soon began to thrive and became happy and content. She was able to crawl and walk around the furniture, was inquisitive, good fun and loved bath times.

**March 2020**, paternal grandparents saw Star for the last time after which point they were denied contact.

**April 2020**, without any warning or discussion, Frankie removed Star from their care and resumed her relationship with Savannah. Frankie and Star went back to live at Star's grandmother's house and Frankie stopped all contact with Star's great grandparents.

**May 2020**, family members became increasingly concerned about the way that Savannah was treating Star.

**4<sup>th</sup> May 2020**, Star's great grandmother made a referral to children's social care that resulted in an unannounced visit the next day. Frankie told the social worker that she felt the referral was malicious as Star's great grandmother did not approve of same sex relationships. No visible injuries were seen,

Star's grandmother said she had no concerns and agreed to supervise contact between Star, Savannah and Frankie for the duration of the assessment.

**21st June 2020**, Star's father contacted the Emergency Duty Team as he had some pictures of bruising on Star's face. He was given the contact details of the allocated social worker and advised to call 101 - which he did.

A police officer spoke to Star's grandmother and another relative of Star at their home and then visited Star and Frankie, who were living at Savannah's home. The police officer observed three bruises to Star's face, which Frankie said were caused by Star banging her head into a coffee table. The police officer alerted the Emergency Duty Team who, with the police safeguarding team agreed that a Child Protection Medical was needed.

The medical examination was conducted the same day. It concluded that the injuries were consistent with the explanation that Star's mother had given of an accidental injury. Star was discharged from hospital into the care of her mother.

The case closed on the **8<sup>th</sup> July**, following a single agency child and family assessment. A note was included that the concerns were unsubstantiated and the original referral from great grandmother was recorded as malicious.

**29th June 2020**, Frankie informed the homeless partnership that she had been living with her partner for a month and had to leave and was therefore homeless. **3<sup>rd</sup> July**, they moved into a flat. Savannah remained a regular visitor to the home.

**27th August 2020**, a family friend was looking after Star. Another friend of the family was there and noticed bruises to her face, which looked like finger marks. The friend took a video and sent it to Star's uncle. He shared the video with Star's maternal great grandfather.

**31<sup>st</sup> August** - Star's father saw a copy of the video and contacted the police. The police tried to visit the home but were told that Star was with Frankie and Savannah in Scotland.

**1<sup>st</sup> September** Frankie called the GP to say that Star had sustained a cut lip when falling off cobbled steps and it was "swollen, oozing red and green stuff and split open." The GP asked Frankie to call NHS 111 as the surgery was about to close. A safeguarding note was put on the file. A health visitor was asked to make contact with Frankie to deliver accident prevention advice.

**2nd September 2020**, Star's great grandfather contacted children's social care after seeing the video of the bruises. The Integrated Front Door provided maternal grandfather with an email address to send in a copy of the video.

A social worker in the IFD contacted Frankie, who said she had already contacted her previous social worker to say that Star had bruised herself falling downstairs. This call to the social worker was because her grandmother said she was going to inform children's social care of the bruises seen on the video. Frankie said that she had also contacted her GP, who, had advised a call to 111 if she had concerns.

The social worker in the IFD reviewed the previous case records, noting this was the second time that Star had fallen. The social worker also checked the health records, which indicated that Frankie had not followed up the advice to call 111.

A home visit was arranged, as a medical professional had not seen the bruising to Star. It was also so the social worker could assess whether there was appropriate supervision by Star's mother, and address the numerous concerns raised by family members. This was deferred until the 4<sup>th</sup> September as Frankie said they were on holiday

**3rd September 2020**, the GP called Frankie as she had not called 111, to offer a face-to-face appointment. Frankie said this was not possible as they were in Scotland. A booked call was arranged for the following morning and a face-to-face appointment for the afternoon.

**4th September at 9.20am**, Frankie was called by the GP. She reported that Star's lip injury was now healing and declined the face-to-face appointment booked for that afternoon.

**At 11am**, the social worker visited Star, Frankie and Savannah at Frankie's home address. The social worker did not have a copy of the video showing the bruising to Star that had prompted maternal great grandfather's concerns or the photo of bruising that had been sent to the police.

The social worker noted that the home was clean, warm and tidy and there was a "good attachment" between Frankie and Star. Frankie "happily stripped Star" and bruises were seen but perceived to be consistent with normal bruising. The referral was once again deemed to be malicious and concerns were not substantiated.

**17.25pm on 4th September** Frankie rang the GP because she had noticed blisters on Star's tongue, something she had forgotten to mention in the call to the GP that morning. The GP offered to see Star immediately. Frankie advised that this was not possible as they were in the car on the way to Doncaster. The GP told her they must access an emergency appointment at Doncaster and advised Frankie to ring NHS 111 to arrange this.

**7th September** a GP phoned Frankie and she said that Star was now back to normal. After this, no professional saw Star or had contact with Frankie Smith before Star's murder on 22nd September 2020.

Photographs taken during this period and recovered as part of the police investigation show a sad child with many bruises on her legs, arms and face. These photographs are in stark contrast to earlier photos of the happy child taken by her extended family.

**13<sup>th</sup> September** - CCTV footage showed Savannah physically assaulting Star, 20 separate blows to the head and body were recorded over a period of two hours.

The final cause of death was an abdominal haemorrhage caused by blunt force trauma. A post-mortem found evidence of a recent skull fracture approximately ten days before Star's death; re-fracturing of her right tibia approximately three – seven days before; and multiple injuries to the scalp, forehead, cheek and back - stark evidence that Star had been physically assaulted on numerous occasions in the weeks and months leading up to her death.