

## **Family reunited after abuse error**

**A couple wrongly accused of child abuse have been reunited with their three children after they were put into care.**

Gina and Tim Williams were wrongly accused of failing to protect their children from sexual abuse.

It followed an incident between their daughter, then aged five, and a boy aged 11, after which a doctor said she had been the victim of abuse.

The case against them collapsed after a medical expert from America said there had been no sexual abuse.

Cardiff Civil Justice Court heard how in May 2004, the father of the girl went upstairs to see the 11-year-old boy lying on top of his five-year-old daughter. Both had no clothes on their bottom halves.

The police were called and the child was then medically examined.

But the court heard on Tuesday that the doctor was using dated practices to examine the girl and also took just one photograph to support her diagnoses that the child had been "chronically abused".

The boy was interviewed by police and denied the allegations - it has since been decided that what went on between the boy and the girl was non-criminal.

The court heard that social services then decided the parents were failing to protect the children from abuse and the children were placed into care in August 2004.

In his judgement, Judge Crispin Masterman criticised the local authority for failing to follow recommended procedures in dealing with cases of this nature.

### **Further examinations**

He said they failed to provide a child protection conference, and that parents were excluded from meetings.

A court hearing scheduled for May 2005 to determine if there had been abuse, and if so by whom, was delayed until September 2006.

Further medical examinations of the little girl were carried out based on the original notes of the initial examination.

These concluded that the first opinions had been reached in error and on the advice of Dr Astrid Heppenstall-Hegar, a leading child sex abuse expert based in America, a further examination should be carried out.

This showed there was no signs whatsoever to suggest she had been sexually abused.

The hearing was told that in light of this evidence, Newport Council asked for the case to be dropped and the children were returned to their parents.

The judge said he had continued with the case to "publicly exonerate those on whom suspicion had unfairly rested" and to find out why the initial medical diagnoses was wrong.

He criticised British medical procedures calling for them to be altered.

He said Dr Heger, the American expert, believed "the UK should either be giving more weight to the US evidence or doing research of its own".

The judge added that the tenacity of the parents and their legal team had prevented "an even more serious miscarriage of justice that has already occurred".

Speaking after the judgement, Mr Williams said he was relieved the judgement had been made.

He said the family have been the victim of a "whispering campaign" and that he had been falsely accused within his local community of being a paedophile.

"Both myself and my wife have been completely cleared of any abuse," he said.

"The effect of the separation on myself, my wife and my children's lives has been devastating.

"I cannot tell you the worry and fear you go through when your children are taken away."

Mr Williams and his wife waived their right to anonymity in order to clear their names within the community and also to try to prevent anything similar happening to any other family.

His solicitor Jessica Good said: "This has been a miscarriage of justice from beginning to end."

In a statement, Newport council said: "The local authority deeply regrets the removal of these children from their parents and home and we are already carrying out a full and detailed internal review to ensure that any lessons can be learned and fully taken on board."