

THE GRAPEVINE

New Beginnings?

Will the green paper create a happier generation of children in care?

On 9th October, the government published a new consultation paper, focusing on children in care.

The green paper aims to address a variety of issues faced by young people currently in and leaving care. It suggests methods for improvement in areas such as education, placement stability, post-18 support and foster carer recruitment. The underlying aim of all the document's suggestions is to create a more stable and supportive environment for young people in care.

An area that the report addresses in detail is education. The statistics for young people in care are still very negative in this area: 57% leave school without a single GCSE and only 6% go on to university. The green paper aims to tackle this in a number of ways, including:

- Putting young people from care as the top priority for the best schools in their area
- Introducing a presumption that people will not move schools during years 10 and 11
- Providing free school transport for those young people who do live away from the area where they attend school
- Appointing a 'virtual head teacher in each area, who will be responsible for driving up results amongst young people in care
- Establishing a £2000 bursary for any care leaver who goes to university.

The paper also introduces plans to improve family services to prevent young people from slipping into care, unless it is absolutely necessary.

It raises the idea of introducing specially targeted recruitment campaigns to address the current shortage of foster carers and to ensure that young people are matched with foster carers more appropriately. The idea behind this is that it will lead to longer, more stable placements, if better placement matches are made to begin with.

All the suggestions made and discussion points raised in the green paper, can not be listed here, as it is too long. However, it can be viewed or downloaded in full from the DfES website.

Over the next few months the paper will be open to discussion and the CLA intends to be involved in that process. We are currently drafting a response to the paper, for which we intend to seek members views. This is an excellent opportunity for care leavers to use their experiences of care to improve the system for the future.

The green paper is a welcome recognition of the fact that care services are still inadequate and that improvements need to be made. There are many good suggestions included in the paper. It must be hoped that these changes on paper will make it to real changes in practice..

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GET IN TOUCH!

If you would like to comment on anything you have read in *The Grapevine*, or if you would like to submit a story or article yourself, then contact us:

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By Email: grapevine@careleavers.com

General enquiries: 0161 275 9500 or email, info@careleavers.com



BRYN MELYN GROUP
Foundation

National Care Leavers' Week 23rd-29th October 2006

National Care Leavers' Week is an annual awareness campaign, organised by the Bryn Melyn Group Foundation. This year it ran from the 23rd to the 29th of October. A large number of voluntary and charitable organisations were involved in running the week's events, which took place across the country.

This year's events included an art and fashion evening at the Tate, a conference at the Ibis in London, and a celebration of young people's achievements in Wales. There was also an event that took place in Bradford, organised by Shipley Leaving Care Service.

CLA had hoped to run an event in Manchester. However, due to our focus on funding over the last few months, we did not have the capacity. However, we thoroughly support National Care Leavers' Week and its aims and we hope to play a larger part next year.

The CLA did launch its new campaign leaflet during the week. A dedicated web page, was also set up, which you can access via the 'Leaving Care' section of the website. Through funding from the Social Education Trust, we are able to offer free membership to all care leavers up to the age of 29 as a part of this campaign.

NEWS & UPDATES

NEW EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

At the AGM, a new Executive Committee was elected. We have seen the return of some old (not to imply anything about age of course!) faces: Jim, Will, Mary and Maxine and the arrival of some new ones: Sue, Chris and Anita.

Congratulations to the new Exec. We look forward to a good year ahead!

We would also like to thank the members of last year's Exec who have stepped down - Delma, Stephen and Ian - for all their effort and hard work throughout the year. All of them continue to be involved as members and are dedicated to raising awareness of the issues and to improving services for care leavers.



Running Man...

Jim completed the Nottingham marathon in 4 hours and 30 minutes, raising a whopping £1083 (plus Gift Aid) for the CLA.

I went down to watch and cheer him on, on the day and was very impressed, especially since it was a scorching hot day and the running continued through the heat of the afternoon!

Thank you to everyone who sponsored him and congratulations to Jim on a great achievement!

Current Figures

CLA Members: 61, CLR Users: 1579, CLR Homes: 851

RECENT MEETINGS

The last meeting was held on Saturday 30th September, at the YHA in Manchester. It was a great day and well attended, by members old and new!

We started by introducing ourselves, after which Mary hosted a quiz on the care system. Anita and Mike pipped everyone to the post and won an Aussie themed prize, courtesy of CLAN.

After the quiz we broke for lunch, then Jim and Vicky gave everyone a rundown of the activities we have been involved in over the past year and those we hope to pursue in the next. After that, we split up into three groups, each drawing up a list of priority issues to focus on over the coming year. We then came back together and discussed each list, finishing by compiling our ideas into an overall plan of priority issues.

This burst of activity was followed by a break for coffee and biscuits and then a dvd of Mary and Stephen's access to records presentations, which were given at a conference last year. Everyone enjoyed the presentations,



which managed to be both informative and humorous.

To finish off we held a short AGM, at which the new Exec was elected and the Annual Report and annual accounts were agreed.

The meeting finished at 4pm and most of us went onto a pub afterwards to have a drink and to carry on chatting.

All in all, it was a really good day, with lots of excellent ideas coming out of it and the opportunity to get to know one-another a lot better!

MEMBERS' PAGES

Free, Fifteen and Failed

It was 1970. I was 15 years old and on the run for the third time. The clock struck midnight. I had just fulfilled an obligation in my contract as carnival queen and was dressed in my full, ridiculous regalia. I had no plan in place, no money and no experience of the outside world. Nothing in my mind, at that time, could be worse than going back to my foster home. How wrong I was.

On reflection of the events that took place that night, I am very lucky that I was not brutally raped, or even killed. If it hadn't been for a worldly wise 14 year old girl that unwittingly ended up running away with me, I feel that night would have ended up very differently. Her maturity and understanding of a very dangerous situation most certainly calmed me down and contributed to us escaping from our three male captors unharmed.

Returning home to seek refuge with one of the girl's boyfriends, who had his own flat, we were caught due to a huge search for the missing girl. I will never forget the way I was treated. I was viciously restrained while the girl was merely comforted. Although I had run away before, there was nothing in my background that would have presented itself as threatening. I hadn't asked this girl to come with me either.

I was interrogated, treated like a criminal and slapped across the face by a policewoman, who told me I was an ungrateful brat and my foster parents were decent, caring people, for whom I had no respect. Once again, I was

forced into silence, totally aware that telling my side of the story would fall on deaf ears. To this day I find, as I am sure do most people from a care background, rejection the most difficult thing to deal with.

To cut a long story short, the care system signed responsibility for me over to a brother, who had no interest in me whatsoever and I was free to lead a totally independent life. Had I been prepared for the outside world and had a support system in place, I know I would have been a high achiever. Instead, I dealt with problems in life by running away from them, rather than dealing with them; this was a pattern learnt in the care system. It destroyed relationships and at 17 years old, almost ended my life when I took a massive overdose. It was my wake-up call; the pain and degradation I suffered in hospital made me realise that I and I alone was responsible for my life and, from that day on, I vowed never to attempt such a thing again and to make something of my life.

I may not have achieved anything like my full potential, but I have achieved many things way beyond the expectations people have of care leavers. I fully appreciate and support what CLA is trying to achieve for care leavers and would like very much to be a part of it. I just can't wait for the feeling of belonging when I meet you all. Keep up the great work.

Anita Cobb

Congratulations!

CLA member, Barbara O'Grady, recently gained a PhD, with her thesis, 'Literacy Development in Foster Placement: Taking care with literacy'

Barbara's research investigated literacy development in the foster placement and the role and contribution of foster carers in that development. The results of her research offer indications that literacy development within foster placement is taking place, and explanations are offered about the way foster carers are instrumental in equipping Looked After children with 'literacy life skills'.

On behalf of everyone at the CLA, congratulations to Barbara on her fantastic achievement!

A Glimmer of Hope (contd)

David Wood's story about his experiences in India continues....

I took my first steps into the Indian sun as I waited outside for the official bus to take me to terminal 2. Having left the UK in around 5 degrees the temperature in Mumbai when I landed at mid-day was 28 degrees and I was soon perspiring under the sweltering heat. This was only the start of the summer in India and in the following weeks that I was there the temperature would get much hotter.

The bus arrived with an armed escort – a policeman with a machine gun but I think he was just hitching a ride; I scrambled on board the bus for the short journey across a corner of the city. The traffic was so busy with strange looking, three wheeled auto rickshaws hooting like crazy. There were scooters, cars, motor bikes, people, dogs and cows everywhere – I've never seen traffic like it – or cows. With aircraft constantly taking off and landing all combined with the city traffic, people shouting and dogs barking, the noise was almost deafening or so it seemed and with everything so busy and manic my eyes and my mind could not take it all in. Fifteen minutes later the bus arrived at terminal two and I checked-in my suitcase and waited for my next flight Bangalore.

Officialdom knows no bounds in Indian airports. Red tape is the order of the day and half a dozen people to do one persons job. I swear I saw three different cleaners sweeping the same stretch of floor in the space of half an hour. There were four or five officials on each flight booth - one to look at the passports, one to check the tickets, two more to double check the documents that the first two had looked at and a fifth nodding his head and typing into a computer. After all that you got frisked by security. Then you were directed onto a bus that would drive you the one hundred yards to the waiting plane. The 1500 mile flight to Bangalore took an hour and a half and on board I got my first taste of real Indian food.

My first glimpse of Bangalore was a very different to Mumbai. As we made our approach the distant sparkling blue sky changed to a brown haze that hung over the city like a tinted glass bubble. My wonderment at this pollution was soon overtaken by my excitement and apprehension of almost reaching my destination.

I recovered my suitcase and was met in the airport lounge by Meela and her husband who was holding

an “i-to-i” sign in his hands. They were a nice, friendly couple in their late fifties. They drove me through the mad Indian traffic to meet my host family. My accommodation was fantastic and my hosts, the Gideon family were the most hospitable people I could ever hope to meet. They were polite and considerate and went out of their way to make my stay as comfortable as possible.

The next day I was taken to meet other volunteers who were staying in another nearby guest house. One of them, Jen's, a Scots lass who had been in India for a month already and was working on a photographic placement took us to meet our in-country co-ordinator, Asha Dey, who lived about twenty minutes walk away. This was my first visit to the chaotic market suburb of Thippasandra, although I soon learned the whole of Bangalore was chaotic as were other cities in India.

Walking through the town in the mid-day heat there were people everywhere and the constant stream of traffic through the narrow streets was truly remarkable. The sights were so new, people ironing cloths on a hand cart, someone selling fish from a push bike, cows with blue painted horns - it was totally fascinating. I was captivated by the market traders selling everything from their hand carts in the street - fruit and vegetables, tools and toys - to shops selling materials, shoes, clothes and household goods. There were cows with blue painted horns pulling wooden carts piled up with sacks and there were dogs chewing on scraps or sleeping in the shade - you had to be careful where you put your feet. The hustle and bustle of the busy streets was breathtaking and the traffic was mad with all of them hooting like crazy. Everywhere people stared at us as we strolled past, chatting excitedly and pointing at the new sights – a flock of white people must have been a strange sight for the locals. I even found myself nodding and waving to the local people and to my delight they nodded and waved back. This was great, any doubts I may have had as I arrived in India the day before were lifted. I knew I could cope with this, I liked this country and my confidence grew...



Our Mission and Values

The Care Leavers' Association is a not-for-profit organization, run by care leavers for care leavers. All individuals over the age of 18 with experience of being in care are entitled to full membership. We work for the benefit of all care leavers, of any age.

Our Purpose

To end the economic and social disadvantage of those who were in care by achieving significant, positive change.

Our Vision

Care leavers fully represented and participating at all levels of economic, social and public life.

Means of Achieving Our Purpose

- Provision of an arena where care leavers can work together to achieve common goals;
- Supporting care leavers who have suffered neglect or abuse;
- Helping with access to childhood case records, so that care leavers may understand their past;
- Provision of other support and information services to care leavers
- Advocating for the improvement of leaving-care provision, so that current and future care leavers may enjoy better life outcomes;
- Highlighting discrimination when it occurs, so that care leavers may enjoy the same rights and opportunities as others;
- Challenging negative stereotypes, so that care leavers do not suffer from the ignorance of others;
- Promoting, conducting and publishing research so as to raise public awareness of the needs of care leavers.

Remember!

**Send your stories, letters or news articles to grapevine@careleavers.com
Or Care Leavers' Association, St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester,
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