

THE GRAPEVINE

Campaigning for Care Leavers

This year's National Care Leavers' Week ran from 22nd October - 27th October. The week is an annual event dedicated to raising awareness about the needs of care leavers and it is great opportunity for care leavers to spread the word about what really matters to them. A series of events was held across the UK to celebrate the week.

The Care Leavers' Association took part in a number of activities, in London, Leeds and Lincolnshire.

On Tuesday, Chris Simpson and I ran a campaign stand about the CLA at a conference in London. The conference was attended by social care professionals, young people from care and public sector professionals. It was a good day and we spoke to lots of people about the CLA, the work that we do and the issues that a lot of people face when leaving care. There was a lot of interest in our current access to records campaign.

On Thursday, Jim Goddard and I ran a similar stall at a conference in Leeds. There is a picture of us to the right.

Chris Simpson ran a local event at ASDA in Grantham on the Thursday and Friday of the week. The week before, he gave an interview to the [Grantham Journal](#) about his plans. This generated a lot of interest in the community and Chris was rushed off his feet a lot of the time over the two days.

He had an information stall and gave out CLA flyers to shoppers, answered questions and did some fundraising.

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His efforts were a real success and he raised £200 in donations, as well as gaining a number of new members.

He has written about his activities for the CLA website and provided a few hints and tips for anyone who might be interested in doing something similar. You can read it [here](#).

Congratulations to Chris for all his hard work!

**Victoria Hull
National Development Worker**

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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:

By Post: Care Leavers' Association, St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester, M12 6FZ

By Email: grapevine@careleavers.com

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



CLA Merchandise Now Available!
You can buy CLA mugs, fridge magnets and pin badges online now [here](#)



Recent Meetings

Annual General Meeting, Manchester, November 2007

On Saturday 3rd November, we held our Annual General Meeting at the Days Inn Conference Centre in Manchester.

The first part of the day was an Executive Committee meeting, where we dealt with various organisational matters and business issues, such as discussing plans to introduce developments to the website next year and planning for the continuation of the access to records campaign during 2008.

At 1pm, we had a break for lunch, which was open to all members and we met up with several of them in the restaurant. A number of people had travelled a long way to come to the meeting, including one member from Cornwall!

At 2pm, the open meeting started and each member of the Exec, along with Victoria, gave a report on various aspects of the work we have

been involved in over the past year. This was followed by time for people to chat about their own experiences and the kind of activities CLA might get involved in.

The last half an hour was spent on the official business of the AGM - electing the new Executive Committee and approving the annual report and accounts.

After the meeting we all went to the centre's bar for a drink and a chat.



NEWS & UPDATES

Media Round-Up

(To read any story on full, click on its title)

19th October - [Chris Simpson spoke to the Grantham Journal](#) about growing up in care and his plans for National Care Leavers' Week

6th November - [Queen's Speech highlights kids in care](#). The speech unveiled plans for a children & Young person's bill, which will include measures aimed to improve outcomes for young people in care.

8th November - [Care leavers in the comprehensive spending review](#). Jim Goddard commented to Community Care about care leavers' being identified as a priority group in the review.

21st November - [Children & Young Person's bill](#). There was a call from a number of organisations that this should not forget the most needy.

10th December - [1000s of foster children potentially at risk](#). An article in The Times reported that many children in private foster placements may go unmonitored by social services.

Did you know?...

You can donate to CLA when you sell on



Click [HERE](#) for more info.

The CLA [website](#) received over **77,000** hits in November

Your top pages were:

- 1 [Forum](#)
- 2 [Green Paper](#)
- 3 [Glimmer of Hope](#)
- 4 [Lost Childhood](#)
- 5 [Annual Reports](#)

CLA on Facebook

The CLA now has two group pages on facebook, the social networking website.

Visit them here:

[Facebook](#)

CareleaversReunited is growing all the time. We currently have **2572 users** and **1094 homes**.

Haven't logged on recently? Do so now!

www.careleaversreunited.org

2008 MEETING DATES

1st March - Leeds
5th April - Bristol
10th May - London
7th June - Glasgow

12th July - Brighton
4th October - Newcastle
1st November - Manchester (AGM)

Meetings are usually held between 2-4pm. Keep an eye on the website home page for more information. If you would like venue details for any meeting please contact the office

0161 275 9500 info@careleavers.org

NEWS & UPDATES

Executive Committee 2007/8

At the AGM in November, a new Executive Committee was elected. The new committee for 2007/8 are:



(Left - Right): Will McMahon (Chair), Jim Goddard (Secretary), Mike Shelton, Chris Simpson, Michelle Jobson, Stephen Norman, Honor Donnelly, David Wood

Associate Members:

Mary Clear, Maxine Wrigley, Sue Sharples

NDW Comment

Victoria Hull, the CLA's National Development Worker gives us a quick run-down of what she's been up to in the last few months

The last two months have been another busy few months for the CLA.

At the end of October, it was National Care Leavers' Week and we were involved in events around the country (see front page). I also took part in a meeting with a member of North Lincolnshire County Council, which was a follow-up to a workshop I was involved in, in September. There was also quite a lot of company business to get done, such as filing our annual returns and finalising the annual report etc.

This was quickly followed by the Annual General Meeting, on November 3rd, which involved a lot of preparation work beforehand to make sure all the paperwork was finalised and arrangements for the day completed. The meeting went well, the [annual report](#) and accounts were approved and a new Exec elected. I'm looking forward to getting to know them and working with them over the next year.

In November, amongst other things, I have: taken part in an interview with the Local Government Gazette; presented to a Community Care conference on the White Paper with Jim; met with a potential funder along with Will and Jim to discuss core funding and prepared the annual report to our current funder.

We have also had a fundraising sub-committee meeting and an Executive Committee meeting. I have made a number of updates to the website, including a [Campaign](#) page and updates to the online [photo gallery](#).

There have been the second phase responses of our access to records campaign survey to collate and hopefully I will be able to publish the results of that soon.

Last week, Jim and I conducted a training session with the Leaving Care Company on access to records and next week, I have got a meeting scheduled with the Adult care & Support Team of the Scottish Executive, to discuss the issue of abuse in care.

I hope you all have a good time over the Christmas period and a happy new year!

Victoria Hull, National Development Worker



**How did you feel when you found [CareleaversReunited](#) for the first time?
Have you met up with people from your old home through the website?
If you have a story, [send](#) it in. We would love to hear it!**

Action on Access

CLA Joins Action on Access Group to put pressure on government, Jim Goddard reports

During 2007, the CLA has been taking part in a group that is trying to improve things for adult care leavers who want to access their child care files. Many of you will know how difficult accessing your file can be, but also how important it is. The information in these files really matters.

The group that we have joined is called 'Action on Access'. It is made up of people who come from different organisations. They are mainly access to records officers (or their equivalent) from organisations such as Barnardo's, The Children's Society and local authority social services departments. The meetings are held at the headquarters of the British Association for Adoption and Fostering (BAAF) in London and are chaired by one of the leading workers at BAAF, Julia Feast. The CLA representative at the group is Mike Shelton, who many of you will know as he sits on our Executive Committee. However, I also attend the meetings and so does David Wood, who is a new member of our Executive Committee.

Although everyone at the meetings comes from different organisations, we all want to improve access to those important child care files. That is why we will be putting pressure on the UK government to make changes to the current Children and Young Person's Bill. We want the government to address our concerns about current access to files arrangements. For example, we want them to reduce the extent to which these records are censored in order to protect the identities of 'third parties'. We argue that care leavers need more information than they currently get if they are to be able to make sense of their past. We also want to make sure that services such as counselling and help with family tracing are provided. A key CLA point, which everyone in the group has agreed to, is that such services should always be voluntary. In other words, care leavers must always have the choice about whether or not they use these services when they access their files.

To strengthen the case that the CLA makes, we need to hear the views of all care leavers. We would therefore like your views about what we are doing. We want our members and all other care leavers to help us to make sure that they have the biggest possible say about what they want to see in terms of files access. It is also possible that we will want case studies to illustrate the problems. This would mean some care leavers possibly being interviewed in the media about what happened when they tried to access their file and why they did so. However, you don't need to do that in order to be able to have a

say. You could just tell us what you think and leave it at that.

If you want to have some influence on this subject then do let us know your views. In particular, you might want to address all or some of the following topics:

- 1) In your experience, what are the main problems that care leavers experience when they are trying to access the child care file?
- 2) What should be done about those problems?
- 3) What are the main personal benefits of accessing your file?
- 4) What have been your personal experiences of accessing your file?
- 5) Would you be willing to be interviewed about your experience?

The more of you that reply to us, the more we can make sure that we represent your views to other people. It will also mean that we have more influence with other groups and with the government. If we can show that this is a big issue for lots of care leavers, we will be taken more seriously.

I'll look forward to hearing your views. The easiest way is to send them into the office, either via email: info@careleavers.com or through the post to the address below:

Care Leavers' Association
St Thomas Centre
Ardwick Green North
Manchester
M12 6FZ

Thanks,
Jim Goddard (Secretary of the CLA).

Spread the word!

If you know other care leavers who might enjoy being a member of the CLA, or joining *Careleavers Reunited*, let them know about us! Promotional cards are available from the office, for an easy way to spread the word.

Can you make a difference?

Student care leavers, politics & making change: CLA member, Alex Kemp, reports on his experiences working with the National Union of Students

For the last two years, I've sat on the national executive of NUS. Being one of the few, fortunate care leavers who managed to get to university, I'm well aware of the difficulties faced by care leavers who try to enter higher education. In fact, HE is simply not an option for many care leavers, particularly given the recent news that most care leavers leave care with hardly any qualifications at all.

So, as well as doing my job representing disabled students, I've also tried to keep care leavers at the top of the agenda in NUS. Although organisations such as CLA and A National Voice do a great job in keeping these issues at the forefront of politicians' minds, it's always been my view that large, powerful organisations such as NUS should also be working on ensuring policy change for care leavers.

It's been tough. The competing agendas as well as widespread change in the education sector (not least the introduction of tuition fees and top up fees) mean that sometimes care leavers are not seen as a 'sexy' enough issue to focus on. We have made some headway, and I've secured some strong policy in NUS, as well as some important work on the issues involved. It's not enough though and NUS should have, and could have, done more to address the issues faced by care leavers in education.

It's not surprising that care leavers are not seen to be an important issue in many organisations, perhaps particularly political organisations. As far as I'm aware, in NUS' 85 year history, I'm the first ever national executive member brought up in care.

That got me thinking. How many MPs are care leavers? How many councillors? How many school governors, parish councillors, civil servants, NGO chief execs and community leaders are care leavers? I guess not many. How can we expect to make change if we're not involved in the structures of making change in this country?

Education is a good example. In order to address the major shortfall of care leavers in HE, major change is needed in the way that care leavers are educated. We need to address the: quality of care provided to young people still in the care system; quality of support provided after they leave; funding of students in further education as well as at university and the expectations of care leavers (many of whom simply do not see college and university as a viable option). This list is not exhaustive and it's clear that to solve the problem, care leavers need to be at the top of the agenda in the corridors of power.

What better way to achieve that than to get involved? Have you considered standing for local council? If

you're already involved, have you thought about throwing your hat in the ring to become an MP? Sure, it's tough, but it's not impossible and being in a position of power is one of the easiest ways to get issues on the agenda and it need not just be politics. A good friend of mine is an admin assistant in a local FE college and was brought up in care. As part of his job, he came across a student who had come to college just after leaving the care system to re-sit his GCSEs. It became clear to my mate that more needed to be done to support this student and, as such, he suggested a mentoring system for care leavers in the college.

The college took on the idea and the student received support from a fellow care leaver currently at university. Two years on, the student is now sitting a course that will probably result in him going to university and a number of other young people have benefited from mentors too. Of course, this scheme isn't going to change the face of education for care leavers – but it has made an important contribution to the lives of care leavers affected by this innovative and important work.

How can you use your influence? It's easy to live a 'normal' life after care if we've been relatively successful and forget our successors who face the same challenges as we did – maybe more. But little suggestions at our places of work, getting involved in local community politics and using any current influence we have can actually make a change to the lives of young people today, faced with seemingly insurmountable challenges.

I'm not suggesting that only care leavers can make change. There are lots of great examples of helpful people who have been able to make positive change for care leavers – despite having no personal experience of the system themselves. But I do think that there is no better understanding of difficult issues than personal experience. In NUS, we have a saying 'he who knows it, feels it' and I can't think of a better example of this than care leavers.

My time at NUS will come to an end in the summer. I'm doing what I can do encourage other student care leavers to get involved too, so that care leavers are not forgotten when the arguments for free education, widening participation and equality are considered in the future. I believe that it's *us* that can make the most powerful arguments, it's *us* that can encourage real change and it's *us* that have the power to make the system easier for young people today than it was for us.

What can you do?

Alex Kemp, CLA member

Accessing Education

Earlier this year, I attended a graduation ceremony at Salford University for an access course for care leavers. Morna Rivers, who is one member involved in running the course, tells us more about it

The University of Salford are planning to extend their educational provision aimed specifically at care leavers following the success of their pilot programme earlier this year.

The Care Leavers Education Project started with a 26 week course from January to July 2007 and nine young people 'graduated' with a university certificate plus two level 2 credits with the Open College Network.

The programme was put together by staff working in the School of Community, Health Sciences and Social Care. Young people from the Next Step project (Salford's leaving care service) were invited to take part in the 26 week programme and now the university are planning further courses to encourage care leavers into higher education.

The pilot programme was designed to raise the aspirations of the young people and examine some of the barriers to educational attainment faced by young people in care. The programme provided advice and support on the options available in higher education plus some practical exercises on writing application forms and building up a portfolio etc.

The staff team were given support from a number of organisations including the CLA and a number of



supporters, who had themselves been in care, came along to give their personal and professional biographies.

The ceremony at the end of the course (pictured here) was attended by the deputy mayor of Salford City Council, Margaret Morris, the Pro-Vice Chancellor at the University, Jane Hanstock, as well as families, friends and other local dignitaries. For more information please contact Suryia Nayak or Morna Rivers at the University of Salford on 0161 295 6463.



All the best for the festive season!

From, everyone at the CLA



The office will be closed from 3pm on Friday 21st December and will reopen on Wednesday 2nd January

Get Involved!

We know that all people have different interests and want to be involved in CLA in different ways. Some people are more interested in newsletters than meetings, some people want to help fundraise and others might want to share their stories.

Fill in this short form, send it back to us and let us know what your interests are!

Name:

Town:

Contact details:

<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like to be a local contact
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like to volunteer for the CLA
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like to give out leaflets
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like to write for the newsletter
<input type="checkbox"/>	I can help to organise a fundraising event
<input type="checkbox"/>	I have skills to offer a small campaigning organisation
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like to come to meetings
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like to make a donation (please see below for details)
<input type="checkbox"/>	I would like to take part in a 'history of care' project

.....

If you simply don't have the time to get actively involved in the CLA, but you still want to support our work, you could think about making a donation.

All donations will go towards helping the CLA to keep going and to running our projects and campaigns. Here are some of the ways your donation could help:

- £5** Will pay for one info pack for schools and colleges
- £10** Will keep our little printer going for 1 month
- £20** Will keep the telephone line going for a month
- £50** Will hire a room for a local meeting
- £100** Will buy 1000 campaign leaflets
- £400** Will enable us to send an Access to Records Guide to every Social Services department in the country, to help towards building good practice in this area.

There are lots of ways that you can make a donation:

- Standing Order (see page 9 for details)
- Online through our [Justgiving](#) page,
- Through the post

Whatever you choose to donate, whether £2 or £200, will be a great help and will go towards providing services for care leavers, running our projects and working for change to the current system.

Why Not Become a Member?

Any care leaver, over the age of 18, can be a member of the CLA. Non-care leavers and organisations can also join as supporters. It's simple, just fill in the form below and return it to us.

Your Personal Details:	Telephone:
Title: Mr/Mrs/Ms/Miss/Other:.....	Email:
Forename:	Profession:
Surname:	Where did you hear about us?
Address:
..... Postcode:	Date of Birth:
<input type="checkbox"/> The CLA will keep in touch with you with new newsletters & other information about our work. Please tick if you do NOT want to receive this.	

Annual Membership (please tick the category that applies to you):
<input type="checkbox"/> Full Member (care leaver waged/unwaged): £5/£2
<input type="checkbox"/> Individual Supporter: £25 (someone who supports our work but is not a care leaver)
<input type="checkbox"/> Group Supporter: £50
<input type="checkbox"/> I am a care leaver. I can't afford the membership fee, but still want to join the CLA
I wish to make an additional donation of £
Total payment enclosed £

The CLA keeps membership fees for care leavers low on purpose, to make it easy for any care leaver to join. However, as a charity, we do need funds to keep running. If you do feel that you can pay for membership, that's great. If you would like to make a further donation, whatever you feel you can give will be a great help.

If you want to set up a standing order so that your membership fee is paid automatically each year, or if you want to set up a standing order donation, you can use the form below.

Standing Order Membership
Donating to the CLA by standing order is a great way to give regular support. It helps us to budget more effectively and cuts down on our administrative costs. This gives us more time to devote to our projects, services and campaigns. Just a small amount per month can make a real difference.
I would like to make a monthly/quarterly/annual gift of £.....
Please provide your bank details below:
To the manager of Bank,
Bank Address
..... Sort code A/c No
Please pay the above amount to: Care Leavers' Association, A/c No 65095940, at The Co-operative bank Plc (08-92-99), Kings Valley, Yew Street, Stockport, Cheshire, SK4 2JU
Start date: Signed: Date:

Gift Aid Declaration
Please tick the box above if you would like the CLA to reclaim the tax that you have paid on your donations to us since 30th November 2005 and on any future donations.
NB: You must have paid an amount of income and/or capital gains tax (in the UK) equal to the tax that will be claimed (currently 28p for every £1 you give)

Thank you for your support.

Please return this form to: Care Leavers' Association, St Thomas Centre, Ardwick Green North, Manchester, M12 6FZ.