

Directors Report

By tradition, the CLA has produced an Annual Report for presentation, alongside our accounts, to our Annual General Meeting each November. This has included reports from the Chair, Secretary and Treasurer. The last Annual Report was produced in August 2010. During this period we changed our accounting year-end date from October to March. Therefore this report covers April 10 to March 11 and covers some of the work in our previous Annual Report.

The last 12 months have been a time of great change for the CLA. The organisation has increased its capacity and now supports more care leavers and can promote greater change in the wider world. The trustee board worked tirelessly and were successful in securing new funding. This has provided us with two more staff and we are now developing more networks of care leavers of all ages and providing advice to more young care leavers. We have also increased our ability to work with more organisations who work with and for care leavers. There was a short gap in the summer 2010 of four months before the new National Director was appointed. At that time, output was reduced but staff and the trustees continued to support care leavers.

Such significant change required us to make some internal changes and update how we are run. The trustees and National Director have developed a robust and comprehensive policy framework to provide the organisation with a solid base on which to grow and develop. We have spent time focusing on creating a productive environment for all to flourish.

We have also focussed on fundraising. We have implemented a detail fundraising strategy with some good successes. Fundraising will continue to be a priority for the next year, with an increased focus on raising the amount generated from individual donations and legacies.

Our activities on behalf of care leavers have been steadily building year on year. The numbers of care leavers using the Care Leavers Reunited web site has continued to grow. More connections and renewals of long-term relationships are being made than ever before. Developing on the success of previous meetings around the UK, we have now established a National Network of Care Leavers. Groups are being established around the country where care leavers can meet with each other for support and to affect policy change at a local level. Recognising the particular difficulties faced by young people leaving care, we have established a project specifically for 16-25-year-olds that focuses on improving the transition to adulthood. Supporting care leavers of all ages in accessing their child care records continues to be a major part of our work. We have increased casework levels and also advise councils and other care record holders. We are currently supporting a group of local authorities to help them achieve our Clear Mark quality award for accessing care records. We continue to provide quality training to a range of organisations to help them improve their service delivery to care leavers. Finally, our advice and signposting service to a range of organisations and individuals in this field continues to grow. We have improved our own knowledge and databases to ensure that we continue to give care leavers information about their rights and point them in the right direction to receive appropriate support.

In the summer of 2010 we undertook a piece of research looking at the experiences of black, Asian and minority ethnic (BAME) young people in care. The 'Speaking Out' project held an event attended by over 80 young people from a black, Asian or minority ethnic background. It produced a report for change and the project steering group has been meeting regularly since the event in order to look at ways of influencing future policy.

It should be remembered that all of the above service provision is delivered under the framework of the CLA being a user-led organisation. Our unique position is that we are an organisation of care leavers working for care leavers. The experiences of care leavers are taken into account in the development and delivery of all services and we regularly both consult and communicate with our members. The aim is to improve the life experiences of children in care and adults who have been in care by using our own experiences and knowledge to promote change. Our support networks are built around the idea of self help and mutual support. The CLA provides the framework within which care leavers can contribute to changing things for the better.

The next 12 months will be an exciting time for the CLA. Our key focus will be on strengthening and sustaining the long-term future of the organisation and contributing to making a positive impact on the lives of care leavers in a range of areas. These include the areas of education, criminal justice, transitions to adulthood and mental-health and wellbeing.

What We do

- **User-Led Support**

Our Network Project provides a space where care leavers come together as groups around the country to discuss their often-shared experiences and collaborate to bring positive change in the care system. These are face-to-face meetings, but we also facilitate email and social media (eg. Facebook) contact. For some care leavers, the groups also reduce isolation and can help to address ongoing needs by providing direct personal advice on such matters as files access. We also run a 'CareleaversReunited' (CLR) section on our website. This is a social networking facility that allows care leavers to reconnect with others with whom they were in care.

- **Projects**

We have a range of projects. For example, we promote improved local authority provision on files access and are currently working on a leaving care guide to be produced by young care leavers. We work with young people 16-25 to address issues related to the transition to adulthood, such as their experiences in higher education. We challenge the attitudes held by the general public about care leavers through a media project that tackles the stereotyping and stigma that many care leavers experience.

- **Training and Assessment**

We work with a wide range of organisations to improve service delivery to care leavers through training and quality assessment. Dozens of organisations have benefitted from past presentations and we have considerable expertise within both our staff team and our membership.

- **Advice, information and signposting**

We focus on informing care leavers about their rights through signposting to additional support services and developing our guides and fact sheets. We also provide some individual casework and are regularly dealing with a range of telephone and email inquiries on a wide range of topics. Often we are the last resort for care leavers experiencing frustration with public sector or voluntary sector responses to their needs.

- **Research, Policy and Campaigns**

We conduct, collate and promote robust research about care leavers and produce policy documents to raise awareness of care leaver issues. We campaign on issues to change the care system and improve the quality of life of adult care leavers. For this reason, we have spent much time these past few months building up relationships with politicians, pressure groups and relevant agencies in this sector. We have also met with government ministers and contributed to policy debates and discussions.

Achievements: April 2010 – March 2011

<u>Organisational</u>	<u>Permanent Service Provision</u>	<u>Projects</u>
Brought on board two new funders	Publications and Documents: 1) submissions to parliamentary review on education, 2) 'Listen Up!' report on the views of 310 care leavers.	Established network groups in the North West, Midlands, London and the South East
Recruited new National Director	Work on unique care-leaver written Leaving Care Guide	Two new local authorities have Clear Mark
Recruited two new project workers	Access to Records Guide (1,630 downloads)	Undertook Speaking Out project and event
Moved into new premises (sufficiently large for all staff and for volunteers and meetings)	10 organisations trained	Young Persons Project Established
Introduced new management and governance structure	Advice to individuals (complex cases): 220 individuals helped	
Developed policy and practice guidelines in a range of areas	Advice to groups: 65 groups helped.	
Produced new strategic plan including a full review of our vision and mission	Membership of 366 (an increase of 126 since August 2010)	
Developed volunteer strategy and recruitment program	CLR numbers: 5,450 members	
Held successful AGM	Website: 45,672 unique visitors	

Executive Committee

Will McMahon – co chair

Jim Goddard – co chair

Daniel Hull – Treasurer

Chris Simpson – Secretary

Veronika Murtagh

Keith Aitchinson

Staff Team

David Graham - National Director

Clare Edge – Deputy Director & Young Persons Worker

Darren Coyne – Network Worker

Vicky Halliwell – Office Manager