

THE GRAPEVINE

Debating History

In an article entitled *History Revision*, published in the *Society Guardian* newspaper at the end of last month, former care home worker, Fay Wertheimer sought to dismiss most of the instances of past abuse in the care system.

She wrote that 'only a small number [of abuse cases against former care workers] will be genuine' and described the people seeking justice for abuse as having a 'witch-hunt mentality'.

The main crux of her article was that the level of abuse within the care system has been greatly exaggerated and that many innocent people have been put in jail due to false allegations. At the end of her article she suggested that people who had genuinely been abused should simply move on, stating 'It's history.'

Naturally, the CLA, along with many of our members, was outraged by her article. It was insensitive, insulting and, above all, incorrect. Not only did she try to undermine the very real suffering that many people experienced as children in care, but she also portrayed an image of people in and from care as stupid, dis-

honest and, ultimately, criminal. Describing them at one point as 'bizarre individuals.'

The CLA made a formal response, which was published on the on-line letters page (<http://society.guardian.co.uk/societyguardian/story/0,,1964335,00.html>). Many of the Exec also wrote letters individually along with Victoria and some of our members. Several of these were published, most notably Mike Shelton's whose letter made it into the following week's edition of the *Society Guardian*.

Our letters acknowledged that not all people in care were, or are abused, and nor are all care workers abusers. However, many people were abused in care and they should be able to seek justice if they feel they want to. It is not for someone like Wertheimer to dismiss their experiences.

If you did not get to read the original article, you can still view it online by visiting:

<http://society.guardian.co.uk/children/story/0,,1958945,00.html>.

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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

Recent Meetings

The last meeting was held in London on Saturday 2nd December.

We started off early, at 10am with an Exec meeting and went through all the various bits of business. Then, at 2am the meeting opened up by members. We had coffee, mince pies and other goodies and had a chat about setting up a network of local contacts. We also talked more generally about how to involve more care leavers in the CLA and people shared the reasons they were involved.

At 3 o'clock, our guest speaker, Liz Davies, arrived. Liz outlined her experiences working for Islington as a social worker, where she had been a whistle-blower on the abuse taking place there. Liz's talk was great, very interesting and informative, although it was disturbing to

hear just how far the network of abuse was spread.

We followed her talk with a discussion about abuse in care and about the CLA's proposed policy on abuse within the care system. The policy will soon be available on the website, under the new section dedicated to the issue of abuse.

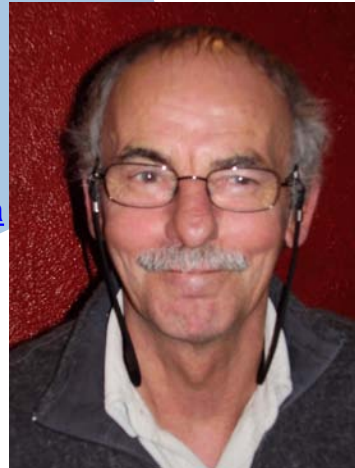


L-R: Will, John, Jim, Barbara, Stephen, Mike and Liz

NEWS & UPDATES

Welcome
to the newest member of the CLA Executive Committee - Michael Shelton.

Mike was co-opted onto the committee by a unanimous vote at the meeting in November. He has been a member of the CLA for over a year and is 'passionate about a better deal for care leavers in society and a severe critic of a system that fails so many children and young people.' You can read Mike's full biography on the site by following this link:
<http://www.careleavers.com/content.php?cat=44&page=76>



Local Contacts

We are in the process of setting up a network of local contacts to promote the CLA in their area and gradually begin to build up local groups.

We have had interest from a number of members about this already. If you would like to get involved, please contact the office.

Currently we have local contacts for the following areas:

Oxfordshire
Berkshire
Hillingdon
Hackney
East Manchester
Grantham
Calderdale
Bradford
Croydon

If you are interested but your area is listed, please do still get in touch as people can always share the workload!

Details will be on the website soon!

In October, the government published a green paper called 'Care Matters' on children and young people in care. The aim of the paper is to improve the care system and the outcomes for the young people in the care system.

The CLA is currently compiling its response to the Green paper, but we want it to represent **YOUR** views. If you would like to comment on anything in the green paper or anything you think is missing, please let us know! Write in or email: info@careleavers.org.

You can read the Green Paper online by clicking here:
[Green Paper.](#)

Have your say and improve care for the future!

New Campaign

By now, you should have had details of our new campaign, along with leaflets, through the post. The campaign is aimed at spreading awareness of the CLA amongst care leavers aged 18-29.

If you think you can help with distributing the leaflets, do please get in touch.

View the campaign web page here:

[CLA Campaign](#)

CareleaversReunited is growing all the time. We currently have **1687 users** and **870 homes**.

Haven't logged on recently? Do so now!
www.careleaversreunited.com

A Glimmer of Hope (contd)

Asha Dey's house, or villa as she prefers to call it, was large even by UK standards. We were invited into the cool, well furnished interior, remembering first to take off our shoes at the front door. More volunteers arrived and after being offered ice cold refreshments by a maid we introduced ourselves to each other more formally then Asha began our induction. She welcomed us to India and told us where our individual placements were going to be and gave us a little background information on each one. My placement was to be in a school called Concerns Universe Foundation, which was located in Cox Town, another suburb of Bangalore and a slum community that needed all the help it could get.

After the induction we were taken out by mini bus to a very posh restaurant for lunch in the middle of the city and to meet other volunteers who had already been in Bangalore for two or more weeks. By now there were about fifteen of us and at 53 years of age I was definitely the oldest. Most of the other volunteers were in their early 20's, taking a year out from university or a long holiday from work.

During this splendid lunch we were told the best places to shop and visit and when we had finished our ice cream and pomegranate deserts we were taken to the city's main shopping district to look around. From there, our first test as Asha put it, we were to find our own way back to our respective guest houses and so we parted company with Asha and Meela.

Jen flagged down a taxi and haggled with the driver who reluctantly switched on his meter. This was my first experience of an auto rickshaw. Heaven help you if it was a maniac bus driver. Everyone hoots at everyone else and in the end we found ourselves laughing partly out of fear and partly out of relief that we were still alive. But the rickshaw drivers were used to it and knew what they were doing. We arrived safely back home hot, tired and relieved.

My placement the next day was at Concerns Universe Foundation School (CUF) and it could not have been better placement for me. This charity school is located on the edge of the slum community in Cox Town, Jeevanahalli - about twenty five minutes from home by auto rickshaw ride through the mad traffic and a far cry from the posh surroundings I was living in. No marble floors here or comfortable beds and no hot running water. This was life in the rough where survival from one day to the next was all that mattered.

I was greeted warmly at the school by Ghana Chitra, the director of the school and Yeshoda, the manager

who ran the day to day business of the school and a load of little children all waving and shouting "Hello Uncle". I was keen to say hello to all of them and so I spent a little time shaking hands with them. It took me ten minutes to get into one of the rooms that doubled as an office. We adults introduced ourselves and I was shown around the small building consisting of four small rooms and a tiny kitchen area with a sink, a bottle of gas and a two ringed burner for cooking and an outside hole-in-the-ground toilet. There were smiling children everywhere and when I looked into their gorgeous eyes my heart just melted. One or two shied away from me and tried to hide behind a teacher and one little lad actually cried – well, it wasn't his fault, to a three year old I must have looked like a big bad giant. (I was told later that the boy was scared of all men).

There were fifty pre-school children there all under five years old and about five helpers – young women from the community. I was not long before I got to sit with the children – none of whom spoke English but we waved to each other and I soon got them laughing by pulling funny faces, or was that my normal expression? I thoroughly enjoyed playing games and singing English nursery rhymes with the little ones and they soon got used to my mad antics. Mind you, I was not the only loony there. Nearly all the women helpers were full of games and would sneak up behind me to try to make me jump. Veena, a happy, chubby lady would try to tie my shoe laces together when I wasn't looking. Veronica had a furry toy mouse that vibrated when you pulled on its tail. She would sneak up behind me while I was talking seriously to someone and hold the mouse on the back of my neck. The first time she did this I nearly had a heart attack. They were always giggling and full of silly pranks – they were wonderful.

The children of this community, and all the other slum communities throughout India, are often abandoned by their parents during the day and left to fend for themselves. In Bangalore, Concerns Universe Foundation has pledged to help these children and to offer education and support to women of the community.

Part 4 of David Wood's trip to India will be printed in the next edition of the Grapevine. However, we are only able to print an edited version of the whole document due to space constraints. You can view the full, original version online by clicking here:

[Newsletter Extra](#)



**The CLA wishes you
all the best for the festive season
and a happy and healthy 2007!**

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.

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