

THE GRAPEVINE

The Good Times & The Bad Times

It is now approximately four years since the CareleaversReunited website was launched. In that time it's popularity and success has grown massively. We take a look at what makes it such a special and unique resource.

CareleaversReunited was thought up by Mary Clear about six years ago. In 2003, it was launched by the [Care Leavers Association](#), as a live website. Today, it has grown into an extremely popular site, with 1762 users and 889 homes spread over seven different countries. It gets an average of 23,000 hits per month and has been called 'phenomenally successful' by the Guardian newspaper.

The site allows people who have lived in care to register their former children's homes and foster homes and get back in touch with people from their past. Due to their background and lack of support systems, some care leavers can feel isolated well into adulthood. Some feel that they can not talk about their childhood, even to close friends and family. *CareleaversReunited* (CLR) provides an arena in which people from care can share their experiences with others from a similar background.

Of course, not everybody's time in care was the same. As can be seen from the [Stories](#) section of the website, there were good experiences of care and bad:

"Although all I wanted was to go home, I loved it there - looking back I think it was the first time in my life that I actually felt safe, protected and loved..." Anon.

"I am still confused as to whom to direct my anger at, the Authorities for my treatment, or my Parents for abandoning me for nearly five years in that "Hell Hole"..." Anon.

For others, it is simply a great way to get back in touch with old friends.

Whatever a person's experience of life in care and whatever their purpose in using the site, *CareleaversReunited* is a space that is run by care leavers, for care leavers. It is a space where people from care can speak about their experiences, both good and bad.

The CLR website can provide a way for people to address their past and, in some way, come to terms with it:

"I did think it was all bad, leaving me with lots of horrid memories and emotional scars. But after speaking with someone on this site I, realised it was not all bad!" Anon.

We have a lot of plans for the website over the coming year. Already, there have been changes to allow photos to be added and we are trying to keep in touch more with the people who use the website. Now, we want to add to the functions of the site, making it more interactive and hopefully even easier to use. Most especially, we hope the site will continue to grow, that people will continue to get in touch with one-another and continue to have fun with it!

"Let me say how happy I am to find this site. I'd typed in 'Boyles Court' in Google search engine and hey presto - what a bloody good find!" CLR User.

If you have a story you would like added to the site, or if you have met up with old friends through the site and would like to tell us about it, email us on: info@careleavers.org. We'd love to hear about it!

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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

Executive Committee Development Weekend

At the beginning of January, the Executive Committee and the National Development Worker all met up in Todmorden for a development weekend. We were also joined by Stephen Morris, who put in a lot of work on the financial side of things.

The aims of the weekend were to make some plans for the year ahead and for the Executive to get to know one another better as a team.

The first day was mainly divided between considering potential funding opportunities and finalising the CLA's response to the Green paper. The final version of the response has now

been sent and you can view it by clicking here: [Green Paper Response](#). We also met with Richard Scorer of the Association of Child abuse Lawyers (ACAL).

On the second day, we got through a lot of discussion about the business plan, a new code of conduct for the Exec and how to develop the two websites.

Everyone worked very hard, especially Mary who was host.

The next meeting is open to all and will be held in Manchester on Saturday 3rd February. See you there!



NEWS & UPDATES

2007 MEETING DATES

3 February - Manchester
3 March - London
5 May - Birmingham
2 June - Manchester

4 August - Manchester
6 October - London
3 November - Manchester
(AGM)

Meetings are held between 2-4pm. If you would like venue details for any meeting please contact Victoria:

0161 275 9500 info@careleavers.org

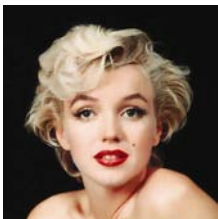
Green Paper Response

Thank you to everyone who responded to our request for feedback on the Green Paper. All your comments were compiled and added into our response, which was sent last week. To read the final version of the CLA's response, visit the website: [Green Paper Response](#).

In a further comment on the Green Paper, National Development Worker, Victoria Hull, will be speaking at the Community Care Live! Conference in Manchester on 1st February.

Spread the word!

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



Q: What do you have in common with these two people?...

A: They both spent time in care!

To find out more about these and other famous care leavers, visit the new campaign section of our website.

[CLA Campaign](#)



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!

CareleaversReunited is growing all the time. We currently have **1762 users** and **889 homes**.

Haven't logged on recently? Do so now!

www.careleaversreunited.org

A Glimmer of Hope (contd)

The final installment of David Wood's tale from his trip to India continues below...

I was the 34th volunteer to be placed at the school and so most of the women on the computer training already had a basic understanding of the computer and some of the normal programs we use at home, such as; Microsoft Word, Paint, Excel and PowerPoint. In the past, they had not been allowed to use the printer very much because of the cost of ink and paper. I bought spare cartridges for the school and more paper so the students could take their work home to show their families. This pleased them very much and it also encouraged their families because they could see that their daughters had achieved something.

I quickly learned that most of them had never written a proper letter before and none of them had ever seen the Internet or knew properly what an email was. However, just over a week after I started, my teaching ideas bore fruit as one of the women, Koteswari, received a reply to her first ever email that she had sent to a former i-to-i volunteer from Australia. The look of sheer joy on her face when she saw this and opened the email was a pure pleasure to behold. She was so happy and excited to get a response she positively beamed with delight. I knew then that my teaching would not be wasted. She couldn't wait to get back to the school with a print of her email to show all the others. They too were caught up in the excitement and became even more enthusiastic to use the internet.

It was wonderful meeting the people of the Cox Town community. Even when I went into the heart of the slum community and saw for myself the devastating poverty some of these people live under, I felt humbled by their friendship and hospitality.

Concerns Universe Foundation is aiming to educate people from the slum community and is helping the women of the community to stand up for themselves and their children. It is helping them to look to the future and to grow with knowledge and understanding. It is helping them to stand up for themselves with pride and dignity and to have a proper place in society. I think given time and help they will achieve this.

It was a great privilege for me to be with them and to share in their dream for a better future.

I was very sad to leave the school as I have made some very good friends there. I made the students promise to keep in touch with me using their new emails. I promised them I would return to them one day and I will if I can raise enough money. I was given lots of goodbye gifts which are all the more precious to me for these people have very little to give. There were a few tears from the children and some of the women as we waved our last farewell. I shall miss little Hepsibar. As I turned the corner of the road in the late afternoon sun, leaving the school behind, a tear of my own fell slowly down my cheek.

David Wood

Because of the limited space we have available in The Grapevine, David's article on India had to be edited. However, the full version, which contains much more detail, can be viewed online, by clicking on the link below:

[Newsletter Extra](#)

Call for Support

CLA member Angela Dempsey has written to ask for the support of other care leavers.

She is attempting to bring about a public inquiry into National Children's Homes (NCH), regarding her son, who was in their care whilst a child.

She would like to get in touch with other people who spent time in the care of NCH and to talk to them about their experiences.

If you would like to get in touch with Angela, please contact the CLA office and we will pass on your details to her or vice versa.

NB. Please note that this is an independent request for information on the behalf of Mrs Dempsey, that she has asked us to pass on to readers of the newsletter.

**Have your
say!**

Have you got a story to tell? A news article to share? A comment on this issue? Send your thoughts to
grapevine@careleavers.org

Members' Pages

Sugar & Spite

Stephen Morris tells of his struggles to retrieve his personal information from a former care provider

This is a tale of spite and victory: the spite of a social work agency and victory because I challenged that agency and won. Sugar is sweet... so is victory!

The story

In 2004, the agency arranged a meeting between my mother and myself. This was to be the first time I would meet my mother in conscious memory. I agreed to debrief the agency on how the meeting went. This I duly did by telephone several hours after the meeting had taken place.

Censorship

In December 2005, I requested the agency to supply me with a copy of the information being processed about me. The agency's response included a heavily censored telephone record of the debriefing. The censorship seemed inappropriate given the record purported to be a transcript of a telephone conversation between the agency and myself. I wrote to the agency twice requesting the full telephone record. This was because I wanted to check the record's accuracy. The agency rejected both requests, citing the protection of third parties (i.e., my mother) as the reason for the censorship.

The Information Commissioner

I did not accept that releasing the full record would breach my mother's privacy. This was because any information about my mother had been supplied by me. I sought advice from the Information Commissioner's Office which referred the matter to its legal department. Some seven weeks later the ICO informed me by letter of its verdict.

The verdict

1. The information is clearly a record of my expression of opinion about my mother and the meeting with her.

2. The information is my personal data
3. I am the only source of the information.
4. Third party considerations do not outweigh my right to receive my personal data.
5. It is *reasonable* to release the censored data without the consent of the third parties and without seeking their consent.
6. The agency had breached the Data Protection Act because I had not been given all the personal data to which I am entitled.
7. The agency must supply me with a full copy of the telephone record within seven days.

The full transcript

I have now received the full record, which I have read. Not much logic seems to have been used by the censor. For example, the record of me thanking the social worker for making the meeting happen had been censored!

Conclusion

The verdict resolves a conundrum. The opinions of my father about my estranged mother and her plans for me is another real life example where the conundrum arises. Granting my mother access to this record would unavoidably disclose information about my father and me. Should my mother or I be allowed access to the record without my father's consent? After all, the record contains our personal information. The verdict suggests not but confirms my father's right of access because the information is his personal data (his views) which he himself supplied. Why then did the agency attempt to thwart my father's access request?

Stephen Morris

Want to get more involved?

The CLA is a small national charity, which relies on the help and support of its members and other care leavers to keep going. There are lots of different ways to get involved. You could sign up to be a local contact, distribute our flyers, become a volunteer, write a story for the newsletter, or organise a fundraising event. Also, if you feel you are too busy, but still want to help, you could make a donation. More details about all these things are available on our website: [Getting Involved](#)

Thanks to the following for their recent donations:
Jim Goddard, Stephen Morris, Brian Doyle, Sophie Cordingley & Susan Batchelor

Keeping In Touch

Delma Hughes is working on an independent project focusing on maintaining links between siblings in care.

Hi everyone, I'm writing in the hope of reaching other care leaver's like myself, who were split up from their brothers and sisters whilst in care.

I spent my entire childhood in care and well know the long term impact this can have. I want to hear from others who are prepared to share their experiences with me, so that I can 'hold & share' these experiences with those in a position to make changes for young people in care today.

I am currently working on a major proposal around this issue. It will involve care leavers in a big way. For the past 15 years, I have worked to highlight the importance of maintaining, in my view, crucial sibling relationships. After all, these relationships are for life, or could be, given a chance. Sadly, there are also those young people who would be safer having separation, which requires respect too.

Having researched this subject widely, I've discovered there is a great deal written about the damage of separation. Yet, I could find no works showing anything had ever been done to address it. This is where I feel care leavers can make a difference. In the end we don't need theories, we need the changes to actually take

place.

I made proposals to various organisations regarding a holiday idea that I thought would be truly amazing. I came up against a brick wall. Until, that was, I discovered a website in America which was all about such places. It is a totally voluntary venture, supported by sponsorship and public funds etc, to ensure that children can go on holiday camps together. Oprah Winfrey, who was in residential Care herself, supports it. I made contact with the organisation and we are now holding discussions about setting up similar programmes in the UK.

If anyone wants to know more about this, get in touch with me, I'd be delighted to discuss it further and would appreciate people's support with this. I would like people's views on this specific topic ,as there is little information on the longer term consequences of sibling separation and I feel it's an essential issue to highlight, both for former care leavers and those in care now.

I can be reached on Careleavers@inbox.com Careleavers@hotmail.co.uk

Regards,

*Delma Hughes,
Artist & Careleaver.*

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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