

Issue 7 Spring 2005

THE GRAPEVINE



A GOOD YEAR FOR CARE LEAVERS

The year 2004 saw a great deal of successes for care leavers across the globe.

In Australia there was the Senate Inquiry into past abuse in state care, which has now launched an investigation into abuse in the state of South Australia.

In Scotland, care leavers received an apology, delivered to them by first minister Jack McConnell, on behalf of the Scottish people.

Here in England we witnessed a number of positive developments. Not only did the CLA grow as an organization, by establishing its first national office and employing its first worker but it also

established the first ever national database of Access to Files Officers.

A National Voice, the organization for young people in care and care leavers up to the age of 25, won a significant victory with their campaign against the use of binbags for transporting young people's property. (More can be read about ANV's Bin bag campaign on Page 16). There was also the involvement of care leavers in the BBC's *Taking Care* season, which brought many important issues into the public light. A great year for care leavers everywhere and hopefully a sign of more improvements and achievements to come!

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CONTENTS

Updates - Page 3 Web News - Page 10

New Commissioner - Page 4 In Care in Germany - Page 11

Memories from Care - Page 5-6 CLA in the SE - Page 12-13

YIPPEE Conference - Page 9 Civil Registration - Page 14-15

FORTHCOMING EVENTS



March 24-29 Office Closed for Easter

April 2 CLA Open Meeting 12.30pm onwards, at Central Hall, Oldham Street, Manchester.

April 4 YIPPEE Conference, Manchester (see P.9)

April 20 *Raising Aspirations* - assisting young people in public care into higher education (seminar), Leeds (see P. 8)

May 28 Copy Deadline for *Grapevine* Edition 8



UPDATES

MEMBERSHIP

The CLA now has 63 members, 9 of whom have joined since the end of 2004. We have members from across the country, but the main clusters are in three areas: 1. Manchester & the North West, 2. Leeds & West Yorkshire, 3. London & the South East. We also have a number of members from abroad, in both Australia and the USA.

We will be requesting membership renewals this month from all members except those who have recently joined.

RETURN OF THE FORUM

Some of you may remember that we previously had to close the CLA Forum due to improper use by some parties. The forum is now reopened and is only available to CLA members. This means that we are able to exercise more control over the material that is posted and hopefully this will facilitate more relative and constructive discussion.

CHARITABLE STATUS

We have submitted our application to the Charity Commission for Charitable Status. We hope to hear more on the progress of our application within the next month and to be a registered charity by the summer!

New Children's Commissioner Appointed

Professor Al Aynsley-Green has been appointed as the first ever Children's Commissioner for England, a post that was created through the Children Act 2004. He is currently the National Clinical Director for Children within the Department for Health. The Commissioner will have the powers to identify the needs of children and young people, to initiate inquiries on behalf of young people and to look into matters relating to the interests and well-being of children. Hopefully it will help to offer greater protection to children in care, who now have someone separate in government who is supposed to stand up for their interests as well as those of other children. The Commissioner begins work immediately, becoming full-time on 1 July 2005.

There are three other Children's Commissioners in place in the UK: Peter Clarke is the Children's Commissioner for Wales, Kathleen Marshall represents children and young people in Scotland and Nigel Williams is the Children's Commissioner for Northern Ireland.



Donations to CLA

The CLA always needs funds to continue its work, particularly to run the websites. If you would like to donate to the CLA, you can now do so electronically, via both websites. Just go online, look for the 'donation' information and follow the instructions. Alternatively, you can donate in the usual way by sending us a cheque, made out to 'The Care Leavers Association'.

MEMORIES FROM CARE

More than thirty two years have passed since spending all of my childhood in residential care.

On reflecting on the ongoing impact those childhood experiences have had on my life, some memories fade whilst others come back with huge force in flashbacks and recurring dreams. This happens particularly at times of stress and around special events, such as the births of children.

How did we manage and cope through those years How did we adjust to the many changes and the different house parents and caregivers? The children's home was my home. I saw the authorities as my parents: so very powerful and not really caring what happened to us kids. I felt I had to prove myself by always being good and accepting my lot in life. We did survive, although at times I felt:

1. A number
2. In the system
3. Nobody's child
4. No real sense of belonging to a real family.
5. A dreadful burden to society.

Being in residential care with the many Aunties and Uncles (the house parents) was at times an emotionally cold, unattached existence, leaving the children confused. We were always aware of the adults weaknesses and inability to cope with large groups of children of varying ages, some of whom had challenging behaviour. Did we distort what we saw? Was it denial? The staff worked long hours and some appeared uneducated. There were severe punishments and unfairness. The way some children were treated by some house parents appeared extremely cruel. I never once felt safe , my body did not belong to me. We never knew what the adults next move was or what they were capable of. There was always the powerful fear of what the authorities could do to you. You could be moved, or house parents could be replaced at what seemed like at a moments notice. Grief and sadness were suppressed and I cried myself to sleep on many occasions. Discussing your concerns was never encouraged.

Institutionalised residential care meant that the individual needs of the child were not met. Life was full of routines and regimes. The thinking seemed to be to ignore the individual child and treat them all as a group for better management. Effective discipline was admired by staff. Adults molded and shaped us. Demeaning words were often said about children's families and the child's personal worth. It was not our fault our natural parents could not bring us up, whatever our background and personal circumstances.

The long term effects and the old scars that never heal for me being a child in care are: 1. Fear of making a mistake, 2. A tendency, at times, to see things negatively, 3. Sometimes I am unable to face everyday challenges; I prefer to remain in my comfort zone, 4. Poor self-esteem, 5. I suffer regularly from high anxiety levels and episodes,

6. Feelings of vulnerable and isolation, especially as I now live outside UK, whilst my relatives and everyone from my childhood live in the UK. This has been a good escape though. My spirit was never broken, even with the emotional, verbal and sexual abuse. I had an inner strength and a sheer determination to succeed as an adult. I recall desiring to be a valuable member of society and to contribute to a better world.

Three aspects of my journey that I could not change and felt totally helpless about were: 1. Being in care, 2. Being a bed wetter, 3. Being sexually abused. In a small way I realise that my childhood experiences make me a stronger person. I coped in the best I could with what happened, which I had no control over.

However, I can now accept personal struggles. I can focus on the good people who cared for me with the limited resources of that time. Understanding about one's past brings about some healing. The truth always sets you free and allows you to move forward. Acknowledge your strengths as well as your weaknesses. My biggest achievement has been to bring up two delightful children into caring sensitive adults. Being in care brought out an understanding of diversity, acceptance, tolerance of others, sensitivity and generosity, which are all vital gifts.

Written by a 48 year old woman.

The CLA has now acquired a fair amount of experience and knowledge of preparing appeals to the Information Commissioner in cases where information has been withheld from a care leaver by the social work authorities. CLA members are now entitled to benefit from the CLA's expertise in this area through free advice and help with appeals to the Information Commissioner. Such advice should improve the chances of success of care leavers in the appeals process. If you want such help, please get in touch with us.



Stephen Morris' take on the Data Protection Act

Life After Care

Hello, my name is Babs!

I was in the 'so-called' Care system here in the UK. Born in 1938, like many kids, I was shuttled around a series of foster homes, nurseries and hospitals until the age of seven.

I met my mum at the end of the war, in 1945. This was not a good experience and I was adopted by my stepfather's mother, who felt sorry for me. Finally, she could not cope and so I was placed into the care of the former Waifs & Strays, now known as The Children's Society. Again, I was placed in various foster and children's homes until I left school at 15.

Life was difficult in the UK after the war years, as was to be expected. It was a struggle but we survived.

I eventually married and had two children. We raised them near the sea and I also bred and showed Cairn Terriers. When I was young and without a family, I was pretty unhappy and not a good mixer so on leaving school I wanted to work with animals and at the same time have somewhere to live. Thus began my love affair with dogs, in particular Cairn Terriers. I have bred champions and made many friends through the years. For me, there is nothing more pleasing than knowing that a dog I bred is making a family happy.

When I retired in my early 60's, having seen the Barnardo's film, which probably started off many a search, I approached The Children's Society for my records. I did not expect to find them but, to my surprise, a few months later I was sitting in a small room in London with one of the lovely counselors who patiently went through my files with me. This was, naturally, a very emotional time.

At the end of the session I asked if I could be put in touch with others

who had lived in the same home as myself. That was not possible, but I did meet one lady who had also been through the system. Listening to her was very traumatic and later I just could not speak to her about my own experiences.

The Children's Society set up some Care Days where others who had returned to them for their records met and shared some of their experiences. Again, there was never enough time to talk because once you start opening up, or listening to others, a torrent of thoughts rush through your mind.

Later, I was asked by The Children's Society if I would like to help with their new Post Care Newsletter. With trepidation, I agreed and so the first Post Care Newsletter was born. Through this newsletter I came to know quite a few care leavers and became aware of the various aspects of being in care. I have since run groups on the Internet where care leavers can come together. It has been an emotional ride, but I hope it has also been a help. For example, I have been able to trace some family members for some people, which is always rewarding.

During my research for these groups, I learnt about the child migration scheme. One thought that has often crossed my mind is that I could so easily have been one of those youngsters who was sent to the Commonwealth Countries, if my Nan had not adopted me for that short time.

If anyone wants to learn about the child migration scheme, you can begin by reading *Empty Cradles*, by Margaret Humphreys or by visiting www.childmigrants.com.

Babs

SEMINAR

Raising Aspirations - assisting young people in public care into higher education.

20 April 2005, Leeds.

Tickets £50

For more info email: ken.campbell@educationleeds.co.uk

The Good, The Bad and The Ugly!

**A Celebration of the YIPPEE Group
4 April 2005 10am-3pm
Comedy Store, Manchester**

It has been five years since YIPPEE first got together. We are a group of young people who have all been through the care system.

The group was started with help from Barnardo's Leaving Care Service & Salford University to encourage social care workers & students to listen and learn from the experiences of young people in care and take seriously our views about the changes that are needed. Since 2005, we have worked with a huge number of students and professionals, trying to change the care system for the better. We have contributed to articles in national journals and presented at national and international social work conferences, as well as teaching on social work courses across the country.

Reactions to our presentations have been varied. We do not try to 'dress up' our experiences to make it easier for professionals to hear but we are not victims and we are looking for some understanding, not sympathy. Our individual experiences of care are good, bad and ugly! Our presentations have been challenging, funny, emotional and hopeful, but never dull.

Five years on, we are off to do other things. This is our final presentation and a celebration of our work. This is your last chance to hear from the unique YIPPEE Group!

To book, contact Simon Locke on 0161 232 4492

WEB NEWS

Careleaversreunited.com now has:
538 homes & 616 Users
These figures grow every day!

If you are registered on Careleaversreunited you can now upload photos to your profile by logging into the site and visiting your homepage.

The Forum has reopened and is now only for the use of CLA members, so log in and get posting!!

We have added Paypal to both of our sites. This has the dual function of allowing people to make donations to the CLR and allowing people to pay membership fees on-line. Access Paypal via the CLR homepage or the Membership section of www.careleavers.com

Praise for Careleaversreunited

Here is the latest example of some of the positive feedback that we get from people who join Careleaversreunited:

Dear Sir, I was told I might benefit by visiting your site and I have. Please feel free to use this letter in the future as you please as, in the space of 3 to 4 days, instead of feeling isolated and alone (my relationship with my two brothers is in the very early stages of repair, I/we hope). I already feel like maybe I am part of a family I never knew existed. Until this week, in 24 years I never asked my eldest brother what he knew or what he remembered. I never felt I had a problem or an issue to deal with, or that my brothers would either. So, after a visit to your site I asked my elder brother to tell me what he thought of our early years. I'm glad I did.

The site you run and other related sites are vital to people like me who know that there is a niggle that just won't go away. Thank you for now. I hope to speak again soon. Jamie.

Lebenslange Narben ('Life-long scars')

Growing up in care in Germany

On 11 January 2005, NDR, North German Broadcasting's *Das Forum* radio programme, comprised a series of interviews with former *Heimkinder* and some of their 'carers', covering the period in post-war Germany to 1970.

Focusing on West German experiences, these interviews related to church-run homes, both Catholic and Protestant. Former trainee deacons, involved in the running of the Protestant boys' home *Westuffeln*, at Werl in North Rhine Westphalia, expressed sorrow at what they had both witnessed and what they had participated in. Deep regret and a plea for forgiveness for what had transpired at the girls' home run by the Sisters of Mercy of St Vincent de Paul in nearby Dortmund was expressed by a representative of the Archbishop's Office for Paderborn.

The memories are sadly familiar and run the full gamut: public intimate medical examination for sexual diseases on reception into the girls' home as teenagers; repeated floor cleaning as punishment; public humiliation of bed wetters at the *Westuffeln* boys' home; sexual abuse, in the case of one of the male interviewees, during his first week; unpaid work in the fields, etc etc.

Interestingly, one of the punishments meted out at the boys' home, being made to stand as a restless child on the landing to wait for the adult member of staff to rouse from his lie-in of a morning, mirrors my own personal experience. However, in the *Westuffeln* case there was a sadistic twist: the boys would be made to hold their pillows in both arms, standing on one leg until they buckled over, to be hit with an umbrella from behind.

Laughing at a whispered joke in the girls' home in Dortmund led to three days isolation in a cell measuring one and a half metres by two. Friendships were monitored and broken up; confidences expressed to a priest visiting to hear confession found their way back to the nuns. Up to now, no representative from the Sisters of Mercy themselves has come forward to apologise.

However, there was solidarity. Despite the pecking order among the boys at *Westuffeln*, they took care to keep night watch over the bed wetters, leading them to the toilet at the slightest sign.

Much commentary has centred on the social acceptance of the use of violence in the rearing of children at this time, and on a social conservatism as a result of which, for example, the two girls of a single mother near Cloppenburg in Lower Saxony could be anonymously reported to the local *Jugendamt* (youth welfare office), ending up in the Dortmund home. One former trainee deacon at *Westuffeln* recounts refusing promotion to house father on the grounds that he would have ended up as

authoritarian as those against whom he had fought. However, another points out elsewhere that blaming the system represents an avoidance of guilt by those who embodied it.

For the survivors of this *Kasernhof-Pädagogik* (teaching method of the army barracks) the effects are - as to be expected - varied but equally deep-rooted. One interviewee kept their whole experience secret until only a year ago, not wishing to be pigeon-holed after mentioning it. Another, less reticent, recounts the continuing debilitating effect of sexual abuse as a child on adult life.

Citing the Federal Justice Minister, there are currently no plans to concede a right to compensation for former children in care beyond that which German law grants to other victims of violence. Such compensation is notoriously difficult to obtain. The apologies on which most German care leavers pin their hopes have been few and far between.

The above is a synopsis of the transcript of the above radio programme, translated by John Goddard. Names of individuals have not been cited for copyright reasons.

CLA In The South

LONDON - Written by Delma Hughes

I managed to organise yet another successful meeting that coincided with the Associate Parliamentary Group meeting before Christmas, which David Woods also attended along with Victoria Hull, the new worker for the CLA; very nice to meet her indeed.

The APG again agreed to my request for a discussion on the subject of 'Mental Health Needs' for people in and leaving care. This was not a simple task, given the complexities and taboos surrounding this particular subject! However, since this is very much my area of work, I was happy to put all of my spare time into organising it. I invited all manner of people to this meeting, once again experts, such as ourselves the care leavers, to present/speak and also to take part in the ongoing discussion/debate that follows. Bob Jezzard, Consultant Psychiatrist for the Department of Health, also works within my own mental health team for 'Looked After Young People' where I am employed as Art Psychotherapist. He was kind enough to accept my invitation to present a very interesting perspective, introducing us to the new policies and changes that are needed in order to reach and help young people in care today.

Margaret Hunter, Child Psychotherapist and writer of the book 'Psychotherapy with Children in Care' also kindly accepted my invite. I have very much enjoyed presenting at conferences with her, most recently at the new national networking Conference for professionals working with looked after young

people, established by 'Young Minds'. I was asked to run two workshops at the conference! Furthermore, Adeola Muir (Psychotherapist), and Caroline Garland (Tavistock), who assessed survivors of the care system, all accepted my invitation to join this very interesting forum. Most important of all was the brave attendance of the young people currently 'in care' and their personal contributions, which were very powerful indeed. I have campaigned very hard to set up these 'young people's groups' within the private and voluntary sector, throughout Kent and Hertfordshire. Finally, they have taken off hugely; the young people themselves have a great deal to say! My aim is to encourage young people to have their say, no matter what others may think and I support them all the way with this.

I will be back again to the APG in January, along with other care leavers, such as Fiona Akers Hutton.

ESSEX

Barbara O'Grady, member of the current Exec, is now organizing meetings in the Essex area. They are open to all CLA members who are interested in attending, but particularly to members who live in that region. There is not an exact date yet for the next meeting, but one should be held very soon. Anyone who wishes to know more should email Barbara (ODellbar@aol.com) or speak to Vicky at the office.

Hilton Dawson Retires

Hilton Dawson MP has chaired the All-Party parliamentary Group for Young People in and Leaving Care since he set it up in 1997. He is stepping down as an MP at the next election. This means he is also stepping down as Chair of the group.

This group has been a great forum for care leavers and others to get together and meet with civil servants, ministers and others. It has met almost every month, usually in the House of Commons, whilst parliament has been in session. It has helped to keep people informed and provided a way of expressing their views in relation to various issues, such as the Children (Leaving Care) Act, Quality Protects and children's rights in the care system.

Hilton has been a good friend to care leavers and will be missed. We have sent a card thanking him for his work on behalf of care leavers. The meetings themselves will hopefully be chaired by someone new and will continue.

Changes to Civil Registration

Proposed Change to the Registration of Births, Marriages and Deaths in England and Wales: Impact for Adults Who Grew Up in Care

Most of you will already have heard about this via email. We have been informed about some important legal changes affecting our members, by Chris Hull of the Post-Care Forum. This forum is a network of practitioners from 16 Local Authority and voluntary sector agencies in the South of England who are involved in providing access to child care records for adults who were formerly in the care system. The following outline is based on their briefing paper.

This proposed regulatory change to Civil Registration has come about as a result of government policies on freedom of information and a desire to reduce fraud in relation to birth and death records (e.g. People creating false identities). The change means that;

- All historic and modern records will be digitalised and, in the future, accessible through the Internet.
- Historic records are defined as post-75 years from registration of an individual birth and post-25 years following a registered death. Access to historic records will be fully accessible to all.
- However, for modern records, access will be restricted to the subject, or a direct family member, and some authorised users (such as government agencies). Genealogists and those tracing on behalf of others will not be Authorised Users.
- Restricted access to modern records will mean exclusion of addresses of parent/s for births. No address for any person noted on a death record, nor cause of death, will be shown under new restricted access arrangements.
- However, due to an amendment, adopted adults will now be permitted, through intermediary agencies to have full access to birth and death

indexes relevant to their birth families for tracing purposes. No such right was given to former care adults.

What the proposed changes will mean for those people formerly in care

- Former care adults who wish for, or require, help in tracing birth relatives through birth and death indexes will no longer be able to ask someone to trace on their behalf (e.g. Local Authorities or voluntary agencies).
- In addition, full access to another persons' birth or death certificate will only be given to those who can prove by their birth certificate that they are directly related. This is a crucial change and disadvantages former care adults.
- In current practice, former care adults may learn the name of their father either from viewing their childcare records or through contact with maternal relatives. The proposed reforms will prevent these adults from tracing their paternal relatives, with or without professional support.

The Post-Care forum want to lobby government to ensure that former care adults are given parity to adopted adults in any regulatory reform. Also, that former care adults, through agencies, can have full access to birth and death indexes records. If you want to be part of that lobbying process, or want further information, then contact Vicky and ask for a copy of the full briefing paper on this subject. You could then lobby people involved, such as the relevant minister, Stephen Timms. Also, let us know your views on this subject so that we can join the lobby on our membership's behalf. You could also contact the Post Care Forum at cwm@childsoc.org.uk or The Post Care Forum, c/o Post adoption and Care Project, The Children's Society, Queen's Road, Peckham, London.

Jim

Community Care Article

Last month there was an article in Community care, which may be of some interest to some of our readers. The article was on the numbers of female care leavers who leave care and go into prostitution. The article was called 'Leaving Care, Loathing Self' and can be viewed on line by visiting: www.communitycare.co.uk.



OUR MISSION

The Care Leavers Association actively advocates and supports radical changes within the care system and services for care leavers. We also act to protect, promote and strengthen rights for care leavers and to empower our members through support, education and training.

Our mission is to challenge negative public perceptions and social stereotypes of children in care and care leavers and to create an environment where care leavers are respected and get the support and services they need and deserve. We welcome care leavers of all ages, from 18 onwards!

News from A National Voice

The initial findings from a survey on the housing needs of care leavers is now available on the ANV website & the full report 'No Place Like Home' will be available in late Spring. The report will contain recommendations.

ANV are now in discussions with ADSS and all children's homes and fostering providers about creating a 'No Bin Bag' policy. This is a result of the 'This is NOT a Suitcase' campaign, which was led by young people. The campaign has been a great success and featured a fashion show with outfits made from bin bags and modeled by young people from care. It was called 'The Refuse Collection' and pictures are available on the website, www.anationalvoice.org.

Submit your stories
etc to the office or email
them to:
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