

THE GRAPEVINE



ACCESS TO RECORDS CONFERENCE

On Monday December 12th, in London, there is going to be a conference on the subject of access to records by adults who grew up in care. The conference will bring together Data Protection Officers from local authorities around the UK with care leavers and other interested people, such as the Information Commission. The conference is being organised by Jim Goddard and by the British Association for Adoption and Fostering.

The Data Protection Officers are the people within each local authority who give care leavers access to their file (or not!). People from the voluntary sector (Barnardo's, Children's Society, etc.) will also be there.

We also want as many care leavers who have accessed their files to be able to attend and join in the debate. We have therefore agreed to keep a dozen places at the conference at a special cheap rate of £20 (to cover catering and refreshments). If you are interested in coming to this conference, get in touch with Vicky at the office for an application form.

As well as Jim, some other members of the CLA - Mary and Stephen - will also be speaking at the event. It is the first opportunity ever to debate this whole subject with the people who make the decisions and have the power over files access, so if you have ever wanted your voice heard on this subject now is your chance!

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Write for The Grapevine!

We want the articles in The Grapevine to reflect the opinions and interests of all our members. Our aim is to have a newsletter that is written by our members, for our members!

If you would like to write a piece for us, whether it be a story about your experiences in, or leaving care, a report of a news story you have come across, a book review, poem or anything else then we would love to receive it. It can be as long or as short as you like.

Simply send your article, either by post to:

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

Or by email to: grapevine@careleavers.com



Co-op Grant Received!!

We recently made a successful application for a grant of £2,500 from the Co-op. This is to cover the cost of meeting room hire, for the bimonthly meetings, Exec travel expenses, stationary and promotional costs. This will be a great help and will enable us to have flyers and posters printed to spread the word about the CLA.

London Meetings

One of our members, Jeanene Powell, along with some other care leavers, has set up a self-help group in London. Meetings will be held once a month, on a Monday at Katherine Low settlement, 108 Battersea High Street, SW11 3HP. All care leavers are welcome!

See pages 6 & 7 for more details.

Change to Objects

At the Extraordinary General Meeting held on 24 September, in Manchester, members voted unanimously to accept the proposed changes to the objects, as detailed in our letter of 30 August. This is great news as it should mean that we achieve charitable status before the end of the year!

Annual General Meeting

This year's AGM will be held on Saturday 26 November at Central Hall on Oldham Street in Manchester. More details will be circulated to everyone shortly, but book the date in your diary now!

Bradford Fostering Panel

We have recently been contacted by Bradford Social Services, who would like to recruit some care leavers from the area onto their fostering panel.

The role of the panel is to assess applications by prospective foster carers and review existing placements. The panel is made up of social workers, related professionals, foster carers and people who are care experienced.

If you would like more information about getting involved, please contact the Adoption and Fostering Unit at:

35 Saltaire Road, Shipley, BD18 3HH

Tel: 01274 434 331

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'.

Help for Care Leavers in their 20's

If you are a care leaver in your twenties, you won't be surprised to learn that there are very few sources of help for you out there once social services have moved on.

However, one source of help that is available comes through the Bryn Melyn Foundation. Based in North Wales, the Bryn Melyn Foundation is an offshoot of the Bryn Melyn Group, which provides private-sector childcare. The foundation has a small grants scheme for care leavers up to the age of 29. They make, as they describe it, 'a small number of modest grants' and their focus is on care leavers.

If you want more details, you can go to their website: brynmelyngrroup.com (then go to the Foundation website and click on 'grants'). You can then download an application form. Alternatively, you can write to:

**The Bryn Melyn Group Foundation . PO Box 202 . BALA .
LL23 7ZB**

Tel. 01678 540 598 Fax 01678 540 682

applications@brynmelyngrouppoundation.org

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One other possible avenue for support is The Princes Trust. They provide help for young people who want to get ahead through education, work or training. The help is in the form of Development Awards of a few hundred pounds. They also provide advice and support. They have a lot of experience of working with care leavers so are aware of the issues care leavers face. They also run a mentoring scheme for care leavers from 16-21. However, their grants, loans and awards schemes are for people up to the age of 30. If you want further details, try: www.princes-trust.org.uk or write to:

**The Prince's Trust
18 Park Square East
London NW1 4LH
phone 020 7543 1234**

South London Self-Help Group for Care Leavers

Back in 2003 I started looking for support groups, or support services for adult “Care Leavers”, after starting to explore my own background of growing up in a succession of foster family placements and Children’s homes.

Through research for a college essay assignment, I came across a project especially for adults who’d been trans-racially adopted or fostered. I thought, “Great, this suits me perfectly”, as I had experienced this, but unfortunately they were in the process of closing down.

After contacting many organizations, social services and Google searches I couldn’t understand why there weren’t support services that I could access in London. With so many adults who’ve grown up “in care” at some point in their lives, where was the place that could offer me emotional support whilst I was making sense of, coming to terms with and healing from the effects of my experience of growing up in the foster care system? As well as being somewhere to help me see my own strength for being able to survive it?

I was beginning to feel really frustrated, and at times even offended at the lack of post foster-care services. Maybe I’d just have to start something up myself?

In 2004 I found and became a member of the Care Leavers Association. I enquired if they held any regular support or meeting groups in London and if not, could they offer me any help in setting up my own. They put me in touch with the CLA member who deals with the London area, and has organized such things in the past. I started feeling that my persistence was starting to pay off.

We made contact and agreed to meet up.

How refreshing to talk with someone who had some first-hand understanding of some of the things I went through, and how some of those things still effect me to this day. The greatest feeling was that, although I knew of the statistics of children “in care” and had been in residential care with many other children, I now knew I wasn’t the only one. I wasn’t alone.

We talked about meeting up regularly with others who also have stories to share, experiences to learn from and triumphs to inspire. Over the past few months this has taken shape with a South London venue booked and leaflets sent to different organizations in the public and voluntary sector that have contact with adult care leavers.

Setting up as a self-help group gives all participants opportunities of practical involvement, identifying and contributing their strengths and sharing the group responsibilities, as well as receiving the space and support to discuss thoughts and feelings about experiences "in care" and the ongoing effects after it.

I have a great range of emotions as we head towards our first publicized South London meeting this month. Most strongly, is my growing conviction that emotional support for adults who've been "in care" isn't to be something a few people are fortunate enough to get access to, but is something that all, no matter how long ago they left "care", are entitled to.

Nina x

If you are interested in coming along to the monthly self-help group, which is open to non-members as well as members, and want more information, contact Vicky at the Care Leavers Association office.

**FIRST MONDAY EVENING OF EACH MONTH:
3 OCT, 7 NOV, 5 DEC 2005**

6.30 – 8.30pm

**KATHERINE LOW SETTLEMENT
108 BATTERSEA HIGH STREET
LONDON, SW11 3HP**

RING THE "MEETING ROOM" BELL IN THE BLUE PORCH.

**TRAIN STATION: CLAPHAM JUNCTION
BUSSES: 44, 49, 319, 344, 345**

If you have any questions about the article or the self-help group please contact me on 07944 204 389 or e-mail MS_J_POWELL@HOTMAIL.COM

Memories From Care

Hi I'm Chris

It has been 18 years since I left care so some things fade with the passing of time, but other feelings and emotions are just as raw as the day I left the care system.

I spent much of my first four years of life in care on a temporary basis. It was a confusing start to life, a sort of yo-yo upbringing; in care one minute back home the next. I was eventually put into care on a permanent basis after the death of Maria Cauldwell. The local social services felt that if they didn't act I'd end up going the same way. After four years of violence from my mother, which included a fractured skull, nine rib fractures and other severe multiple injuries all I can say is good call social services! My mother to this day blames either the social services or anyone else who is handy at the time. Other days she claims to have forgotten everything saying with a blank look her face ' I don't remember that.' My father on the other hand comes out with ' People and you don't understand the circumstances.' I am still waiting for my dad to explain what these mysterious circumstances were some thirty years later, he never will now of course. I do not now have a relationship with my parents which is my choice and a good one at that. When I was younger they would try and undermine me as if to make me feel guilty for what happened, it's called projection a psychologist once told me, so I haven't bothered with them for some years now.

After leaving my parents I spent several months in the local children's home Sandon Lodge. This was a confusing time for me as I wasn't fully aware of the situation so it was a bit bewildering, but on the whole I was happier there than at home for obvious reasons.

I then moved to a small village to live with a couple for two years. Irene and Bill were a lovely couple and I spent a very very happy time there. Unfortunately it came to an end very quickly as Bill suddenly died. So there was more heart-break for me and I had to move on.

I then moved into lodgings with a middle aged couple and stayed with them for nine months from seventeen to nearly my eighteenth birthday. This was destined to fail and it did after nine months, they were only in it for a bit of extra cash and I soon became wise to this.

I then stayed with a couple for just a few weeks Gary and Madge as an emergency foster placement. These were the happiest few weeks of my later childhood it was a laugh a minute.

I then stayed with a family for a few months on a temporary basis I didn't really bond with them but they were good to me. I was still traumatised by the death of my previous foster father.

The social services then found me a family on a permanent basis. I didn't know that it was going to be permanent at the time. I spent seven years with John and Jen and these were largely happy and uneventful, apart from interference from my real parents. John and Jen then moved down south and I decided to stay in the local area. This was a mistake!

I then moved to a family and I lived with them for three years. I won't name them but he was a policeman. What I can say is that I experienced emotional abuse and bullying on a daily basis. I managed to escape their clutches after three years thanks to an extremely good social worker. After I left them they were investigated and not allowed to foster again. I had to battle against a lot of prejudice, after all who is society going to believe a policeman or a foster child. Like all bullies, really, they are cowards and the policeman eventually lost his house, family, job and shortly afterwards his sanity ending up in the local mental institution. Some people were shocked but both myself and my social worker weren't. Never judge a book by its cover as they say. Today when people say "that child has a bad attitude." I reply by saying "Walk a mile in their shoes before you comment."

By this time I was approaching my eighteenth birthday so I was put into lodgings. I rented a room from Gary and Wendy who were an unemployed couple and I spent the rest of my time in care with them and a further two years after that as well.

This is probably just an average story of a persons experience in care. The thing that shocked me at the time, and still shocks me today, was the complete lack of aftercare support. In 1987 when I left care all I got was a speech from my current social worker, which wasn't any good anyway, and a cheque for £5.80. Then that was it goodbye have a nice life.

For all its traumas I'm glad and proud of being fostered. I'm forever challenging peoples perceptions of children in care battling their prejudices.

I was invited to speak to prospective foster parents a while ago now to give them an insight of what it was like for me to live in care. This was a great experience for me and the prospective foster parents really enjoyed telling me that it was the best part of the week.

So I was very happy to find out about Care Leavers Association and joined in January of this year. I want to play my part in changing the views of society towards children in care and increase the level of support for careleavers.

Good wishes to you all

Chris

SUMMARY OF RECENT MEETINGS

Exec Meeting 24 September 2004, 10.00 am - 12.00 pm

Present: David Woods (Chair), Jim Goddard, Mary Clear, Barbara O' Grady, Maxine Wrigley, Victoria Hull (Minutes)

Apologies: Neville Ball

A report of income and expenditure was distributed to the Exec along with details of the current finances. The Exec was advised that the CLA recently received a grant of £2,500 from the Co-op to cover meeting room hire, travel expenses, stationary and promotional costs. Ongoing funding is still being sought.

There was a discussion on the CLA's position on the reform of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000. It was agreed that the existing position paper would be put up on the website and members could give their feedback.

Stephen Morris' proposed change to the mission statement was circulated and discussed. It was agreed that this was a good proposal but that the feedback of the membership should be sought as well.

It was agreed that, following the Annual General Meeting (AGM) in November, the start time of Exec meetings would be moved from 10.00 am to 12.00 pm, to allow people who travel greater distances to do so with more ease.

It was decided that the following Executive posts would be up for election at the AGM: Chair, Secretary, Treasurer, Access to Records Representative, Young Person's Representative, Mental Health Representative, Leaving Care Representative, Education Representative and two Open Executive posts.

Extraordinary General Meeting, 24 September 2005

Present: David Woods (Chair), Jim Goddard, Mary Clear, Barbara O' Grady, Christopher Simpson, Stephen Morris, Ian Dickson, Patricia Tello, Victoria Hull (Minutes)

Apologies: Maxine Wrigley, Neville Ball

The amendments to the objectives, necessary to achieve charitable status, were presented to the meeting and there was a unanimous vote to accept, by both those present and those who voted by proxy.

There was a discussion of the reform of the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000, following on from the previous meeting., which produced some productive ideas.

There was a discussion of Stephen's Mission Statement and it was agreed that Stephen & Ian would continue to work on this and then it would be distributed to the members for their input.

A new logo was chosen from amongst all the ideas submitted.

It was agreed that Stephen would write to Baroness Ashton on behalf of the CLA to comment on the data protection act and the restrictions that the Durant vs FSA case imposes.



NEWS FROM
DOWN UNDER

**ACCESS TO RECORDS:
WESTERN AUSTRALIA LEADS THE
WAY**

On Wednesday 14 Sept 2005, Jim and Stephen attended the UK launch at Australia House in London of Western Australia's information project for all those who had been in its care, including child migrants. The launch was attended by people from NCH, Barnardo's, The Children's Society, BAAF, The Salvation Army as well as by ourselves from the CLA.

The Western Australian government has compiled information about all the residential homes and all the sending agencies, with descriptions of the records that still exist right back to 1920 (and sometimes earlier) into a single resource. The purpose of the project is to point care leavers to their records, which may be dispersed across several agencies (State government, Police, Prison, School, Hospital, etc).

It is a monumental piece of work which was born out of recognition that the state government owed some kind of recompense for the manner in which young people were treated in those days (including the aboriginal peoples of Australia who probably had it worse than anybody). The outcome of the project is a website, Signposts (<http://signposts.communitydevelopment.wa.gov.au>) and a printed manual, both of which detail all the homes etc and how to go about accessing records.

There is talk at the moment that something similar should be done in the UK, i.e. that a central information point should be established for care leavers, telling them where their records are kept. At this stage, it is not altogether clear how transplantable the Signposts model is to the UK context.

Family Tracing Changes

The impact on birth parents, A CLA member's perspective

I write as an older care leaver interested in the new legislation to be implemented towards the end of this year. Under section 98 of the Adoption & Children Act 2002, birth relatives of an adopted adult gain new rights of access to information. As a birth mother, I can request an Adoption Support Agency to provide an intermediary service, so that they can trace my adopted child and let him know I would like contact with him. The adopted adult retains the right to refuse contact if that is their wish. Until now, it was possible for adopted people from the age of 18 onwards to trace their birth parents, but not for birth parents to initiate a search.

I gave my baby son up for adoption in the 1960's, when unmarried mothers were viewed as morally unfit and every child was deemed to need two parents. The term 'unmarried mother' carried connotations of shame and disgrace, evoking images of the 'scarlet woman' and sanctioning the separation of mothers from their babies. I was 17 when I found myself pregnant and I was moved to an Unmarried Mothers' Home as my foster parents were unable to support me and my parents were dead.

For forty years I have lived with the socially unspeakable loss of my son, a trauma that has been hard to come to terms with. When people ask if I have children I often say no. It has been too complex to explain. The change in legislation means that I now have a choice about whether to trace or not. This changes how I think about myself and potentially, my relationship with others. I am thinking about tracing my son and I already feel a mix of raw emotion. A reunion would be a life changing event and I would need support before taking steps in that direction. Fortunately, I go to a therapy group and I am able to talk things through and get support there. I have also made contact with an adoption agency and they recommended *The Adoption Reunion Handbook*, by Liz Taylor, Julia Feast and David Howe. I have found the book useful in thinking through the search and reunion journey, as it includes some possible scenarios and suggestions for coping with the challenges that may arise. But it is written largely with a view to helping adopted adults who want to trace their birth parents. None of the scenarios involve people from a care background. I think that resources will be needed to support birth mothers through the process and to help them deal with the long-term challenges that may result from adoption reunions.

I would like to hear the views and suggestions of other CLA members regarding this legislation.

Rachel Williams (CLA Member)

Access To Charitable Sector Case Files

In this piece, the effect of the Data Protection Act and the Gaskin case of 1989 on the charitable sector's case files is considered. The major charities in this context are Barnardo's, The Children's Society, and NCH but this list is not exhaustive. If you were in care with a charity than this piece may be interesting to you.

Although the access provisions of the Data Protection Act catch only case files of local social services authorities, its enactment may have had a subtle impact on the charities whose case files are not caught by the Act's access provisions. This means the charities are under no legal obligation to grant access to case records of persons placed in their care as children because the Data Protection Act does not apply to their case files. However, an exception arises if case files are stored using automated equipment (computer) but it is most unlikely that charitable sector case files are so stored.

However, it is my belief that the charities have been obliged to reconsider the secrecy with which they have traditionally kept their case files because of the Gaskin case of 1989 and the Data Protection Act of 1998. Although some of the charities may loathe it, they now recognise they can no longer defend their historical position of secrecy. This is because legislation now grants statutory access to records of an identical nature to persons who were in local authority care. In other words, the charities would be swimming against the tide if they continued to deny access to their case files. I suggest the charities are motivated to release their case files to their former wards out of fear that their charitable status may be revoked (or at least challenged) if they were to continue to deny access. Such denials of access would fly in the face of the Data Protection Act and the Gaskin case of 1989, both of which stem from, or engage, Article 8 of the European Convention on Human Rights. It would be difficult for the charities to claim altruistic aims and objects if their practices were incompatible with Article 8, even if the European Convention on Human Rights does not usually catch the charities. Article 8 places a legal obligation on public authorities (but not the charities) to respect the private and family life of individuals, including care leavers.

However, despite the pressures that the enactment of the DPA may have brought to bear on the charities in respect of files access, there is one right granted by the DPA that is not available to care subjects whose case files are held by the charities. This is the right of independent appeal to the Information Commission, which is only available when the Data Protection Act applies. So although the charities may now have adopted general policies of files access as if the Data Protection Act applies, in specific and individual case of access-denial the care subject has no right of appeal to an independent body. This right of appeal is available only to care subjects from local social services authorities.

If you are experiencing difficulty with accessing your charitable case file, please contact me via the CLA. I would be very pleased to help.

Stephen Morris

BOOKS

Stephen Morris has supplied us with the publicity material for Graham Gaskin's biography:

"The Story of Graham Gaskin is shocking, thought-provoking and heart-rending. When he was only nine months old, his mother committed suicide by throwing herself off the Wallasey ferry. This formative loss triggered the start of a life of neglect and abuse which would set the scene for the continual suffering and pain that he would endure.

Unable to cope with his children, Graham's father handed him over to social services and, from that moment forward, he was passed from pillar to post, with no one person ever taking responsibility for his welfare. Having fled from abusive foster parents, he was sent to an adult psychiatric unit and from there to a strict school for orphans. Having escaped from the institution, he set a pattern that was to be repeated throughout his life - fleeing, sleeping rough, petty crime, capture and incarceration.

Using his streetwise guile, he managed to get his hands on his social services file and, with the help of the Liverpool Echo, exposed the years of neglect and suffering and claimed for damages against social services. Yet, throughout the catalogue of pain, he refused to let his spirit be broken. Despite the tough exterior he had been forced to cultivate, he displayed an inner gentleness and an eagerness to find some level of happiness.

Unable to settle and always filled with the need to escape, Gaskin fled the UK and traveled around the world living by his wits and often making money by smuggling drugs. Never quite able to shake off the past and forget the brutality he encountered as a child, he was suspected of murdering a British man in Manila and extradited to Britain. It was while serving a life sentence that he died of AIDS.

This is the controversial and emotional story of a forgotten child, told in his own words. It is a shocking expose of the abandonment of a boy who, through no fault of his own, was left to fight his own battles, and how he struggled to survive and see justice done. The way in which he remains haunted by his childhood throughout his life makes the book a valuable social document."

Gaskin, G. (2005) A Boy Called Graham, Blake Publishing

***The Secret of Bryn Estyn: The Making of a Modern Witch Hunt* by
Richard Webster**

Richard Scorer, a partner at Pannone & Partners Solicitors and a member of the Association of Child Abuse Lawyers, has written a review of Webster's new book. The following is a shortened version of that review.

Richard Webster is a writer and campaigner against so-called police trawling operations which he alleges have resulted in innocent care workers being convicted of abuse of children. In this 700 page book Webster purports to "tell the extraordinary story of what really happened in North Wales". Webster's argument is that the North Wales scandal started with the framing of an innocent care worker, Peter Howarth, and became a witch hunt of historic proportions in which many innocent men and women were falsely accused of child abuse. Webster's book has garnered plaudits from many reviewers, with even journalists like Christian Wolmar seduced by the apparent force of his arguments. This is, indeed, an extremely detailed and lengthy book, very well written and in parts, very cogently argued. However, I would put a very stark health warning on the front of the book. This is a very unbalanced book, and Webster is economical with the facts when it suits him to be.

For example, Webster mentions John Allen and the Bryn Alyn scandal only once, and even then only in passing and without any background detail, so to suggest that this book is any kind of comprehensive account of what really happened in children's homes in North Wales is simply untrue. However, Webster's treatment of the allegations of abuse which nobody, not even FACT, can dispute, may reveal his true views on the subject of child abuse. In a few lines of a 700-page book, Webster mentions that Stephen Norris, who worked at Bryn Estyn as well as being at one stage the officer-in-charge of Cartrefle, pleaded guilty to multiple counts of sexual abuse of children, including buggery of boys at Bryn Estyn. Webster, however, has nothing to say about the implications of these convictions, save to suggest that they created a climate in which it was easier to convict other individuals.

Those who are familiar with the details of the North Wales scandal will recognise [the book] as unbalanced and misleading. Unfortunately, because it is so powerfully written, this is likely to be lost on the general reader. Webster concludes that the North Wales Tribunal was a witchhunt. It was never a witchhunt; it was simply a far more balanced examination of the evidence than appears in this book.

The full review can be read by visiting www.childabuselawyers.com



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!

WRITE FOR THE GRAPEVINE!!!!

We want The Grapevine to reflect all our members views and experiences, so please write to us! Submit your material by the end of August for the next edition!



Submit your stories
etc to the office or email
them to:
Grapevine@careleavers.com

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