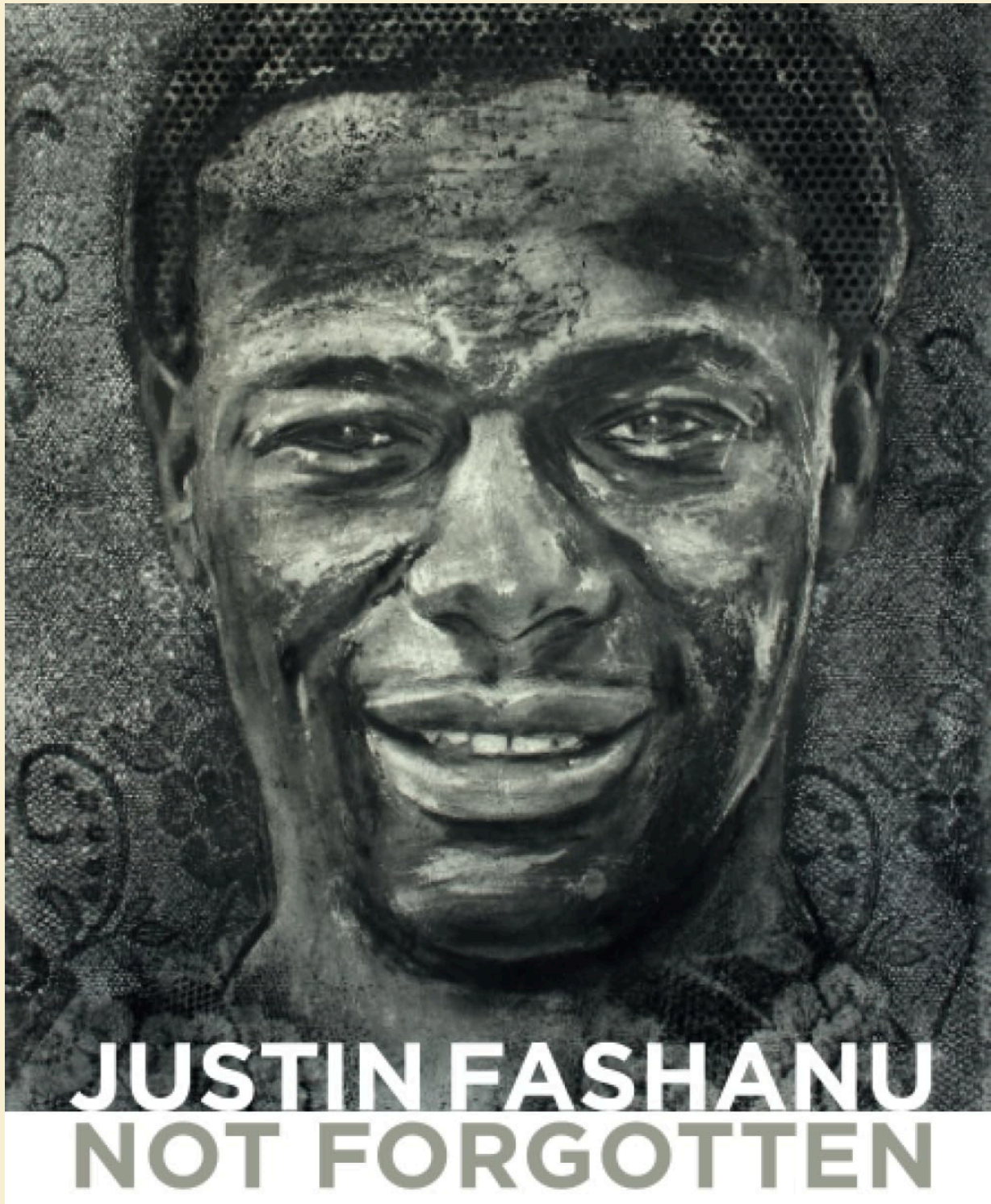


Care Leavers **Connected**

Volume 1 | Issue 4

Spring Edition: May 2025



**More than a footballer: Justin Fashanu's
journey from care to courage**

Welcome

Dear readers,

Welcome to the fourth edition of Care Leavers Connected.

We are really pleased that so many care leavers have decided to write articles and share photographs and accounts of their lives since the magazine launched in July last year. In fact, we almost have enough material for next Summers' edition, so the Editorial Board will be thinking about whether to increase the number of pages or publish more than four editions a year.

Have a look at the new Care Leavers Connected website

The new Care Leavers Connected website, was launched on May 9th it will reflect the diversity and strength of those who have navigated life in and after care. While we are all very different people, being in care has given us many common experiences.

This website is a pilot which we have decided to keep as simple as possible. We encourage you to register on it, look for or add any homes or placements you were in when you were in care and let us know how the site works for you. At this pilot stage we need to know what you like about the site and what you think could be done better, **so tell us what you think at the email address below, your views are really important to us.**

Keep sending us your articles, pictures and thoughts and feelings about life as an adult care leaver to connected@careleavers.com. - all contributions are welcome.

We hope you enjoy this issue - our lead story focuses on the life of care leaver and footballer Justin Fashanu who has had a new biography written about him.

The Editorial Team: Akiyinde, Jim, Mal, Stephen, Terri, Toya, Will and Yasmine

If you are reading a hard copy of this magazine and need any of the links included, please contact connected@careleavers.com



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Ways to get involved in the CLA

If you simply don't have the time to get actively involved in the CLA, but you still want to support our work, you could think about [making a donation](#). All donations will go towards helping the CLA run projects and campaigns for care leavers

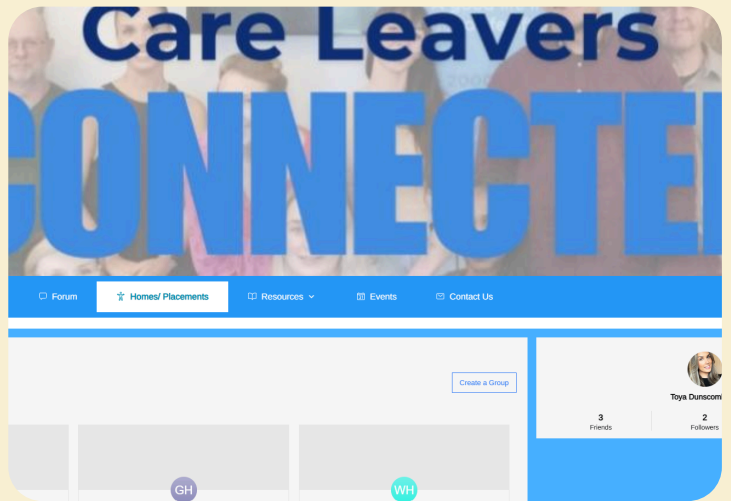


Latest News

Website launch

The new Care Leavers Connected website was launched on May 9. It will celebrate the diversity and strength of those who have navigated life in and after care.

This website is a pilot which we have decided to keep as simple as possible. We encourage you to register on it and look for or add any homes or placements you were in when you were in care.



Older Care Leavers Project

We are introducing a series of four-week programmes focused on cooking, art, and photography. Designed to encourage creativity, connection, and self-expression in a supportive environment.

These sessions offer care leavers aged 25+ an opportunity to share experiences and explore their personal journeys in a reflective, yet engaging manner. If you would like to get involved email us at connected@careleavers.com

Annual Gathering 2025

Save the date for our AGM on Saturday 31st May. This is a chance to come together, share experiences, have your voice heard, and help shape the future of the CLA. The picture on the left is of the trustees and staff who attended the 2024 AGM.

Whether you're a long-time member or new to the community, we'd love to see you there! We will also be selecting our new trustees for the CLA this year. If you would like some more details please get in touch via info@careleavers.com



We understand that some of the articles in this magazine are about sensitive issues. If you need any support please contact us on 0161 826 0214 and leave a voicemail. We will return your call. You can also contact us by email connected@careleavers.com or on social media. If you need urgent support please contact the Samaritans on 116123.

Justin Fashanu 1961-1998

Jim Read writes about his biography of footballer Justin Fashanu

Justin Fashanu was the first professional footballer to come out as gay and the first Black footballer to be transferred for £1 million. And he was a care leaver.

When his mother from Guyana and his father from Nigeria separated he was sent to a Barnardo's home. Justin was four when he and younger brother, John, were taken from the children's home in London to live with white foster parents in a small Norfolk village. There they remained for the rest of their childhoods.

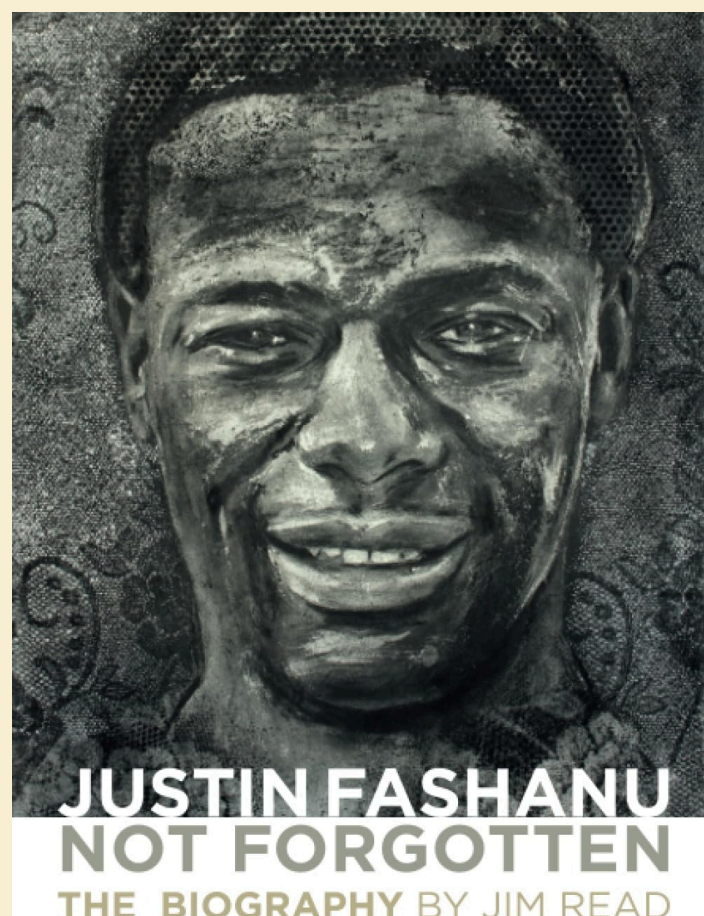
Justin was a teenage soccer sensation with Norwich City but his big money move to Nottingham Forest went badly wrong. There he was bullied by manager, Brian Clough. Justin became a born-again Christian and was realising he was gay.

He was rebuilding his football career with Notts County when he sustained a knee injury from which he never fully recovered. While undergoing several operations, Justin played in the USA and Canada between unsuccessful trials with English clubs.

Forced to come out as gay

In 1990 he was forced to come out as gay. John, his brother, publicly rejected him and they rarely spoke after that. Justin showed a great deal of courage in continuing to pursue his football career, eventually moving to Scotland where he played for Airdrie and Hearts. In 1998 Justin was coaching in Maryland, USA when he was accused of a sexual assault. Fearing an unfair trial, he took his own life.

Four years later I began researching for a biography. To be able to write with awareness and sensitivity I had to learn more about aspects of Justin's life which were unfamiliar to me. As a white man brought up by my birth parents I needed a deeper understanding. I would not have begun the project without the active support of my partner, Veronica, a CLA member.



Justin was a charming and witty interviewee whether speaking to sports journalists or TV chat show hosts but he seldom talked about his experience of being in care.

An exception was an interview he gave to three teenage boys from a children's home in Plymouth for a magazine, *Who Cares?* which was written by and for young people in care. This was in 1992 when he was playing for Torquay United. They asked him, 'If you could have changed anything while you were in care what would you have changed and why?' He told them, 'I would probably have been a little more open to people, to let people help me and talk to me. I had to close up and give the impression everything was cool and fine.'

The new edition of Justin Fashanu Not Forgotten The Biography was launched online by the CLA in February 2025. It is available from the usual outlets.

Me and My Files

'They reveal I am a doorstep baby'

I accessed my London County Council (LCC) records in February 2025. They are a Pandora's Box and an ugly can of worms that reveal the total lack of trust and respect between my Foster Parents and the LCC Child Welfare Officers who were responsible for my care.

All of the details below come from my files as a matter of record. They reveal I am a doorstep baby and the story experienced by my Welfare Officers and my Boarding School in their battles and struggles with each other and their vain attempts to maintain a mask of competence when all around me my world as a child and teenager was collapsing.

As a result of my experience, I firmly believe all children placed in care should by law be given their records after leaving care aged 18 or 21 so they can seek legal advice if they believe the Authorities responsible for their care acted against their interest and/or in fact, placed them at greater risk than if they had stayed with their original parents.

Littered with warnings

My LCC Records are littered with warnings about my Foster Mother and red flags regarding her attitude to fostering children. These warnings also came from the Headmistress of my Boarding School who reported to the LCC my Foster Mother was "mentally unbalanced" and in another report that she was "mad". In other reports from my Welfare Officers, they claimed she was "difficult" "hard" and "unenthusiastic" as a Foster Mother.



Roger

The most serious red flag is the letter written by my Foster Parents who refused to fill in the LCC adoption application form on the grounds the questions on the application form breached their rights of privacy!!!

So, what were these questions and why were they regarded with such distaste? In my opinion, a copy of the LCC adoption form needs to be urgently perused because if it stopped my foster parents from filling it in then it must have also stopped other potential adopters.

Another person, Mrs. Kirby" (she took teenagers in care) claimed the 2 Hostels the LCC placed me at were a breeding ground of criminality and should be "closed down".

My biological Mother wrote to the LCC and the Headmaster of my Boarding school enquiring about me. I was, however, never informed by the LCC. Typical!!

Do you want to share your account of you and your files? You can remain anonymous if you want to

If you would like to write about your files then please send an email to connected@careleavers.com for more details. Please note, you can remain anonymous if you are not sure about writing then we can chat to you and make notes of what you want to say for an article

Me and My Files ...

Perhaps the most famous doorstep baby is Harry Potter

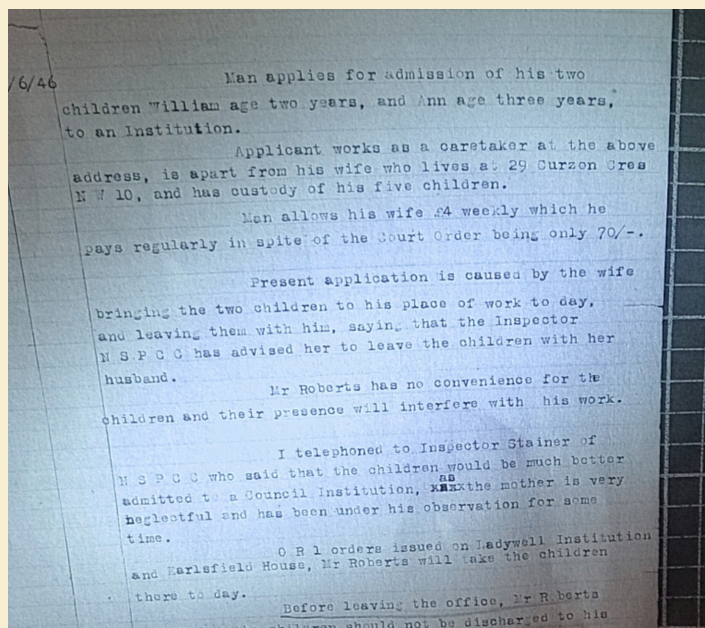
He was left outside of his maternal Aunt and Uncle's home by Dumbledore who thought it was safer for Harry to grow up with them until he was 17.

His parents had been murdered, so that's why Dumbledore thought it wise to get Harry to a safe place. He didn't bother to knock, because if you have been faced with a 100-year-old wizard, who can turn into a cat, he would probably scare the wits out of you as well!

Aged only two years. I was too young to know who dumped me on my dad's doorstep in Finchley, north London. At the time he was at work, but at least it was a posh doorstep in the better part of Finchley. According to my London County Council (LCC) child welfare records, my parents had separated.



I did not know about my doorstep delivery until I received my records at the start of 2025 at the age of 81. So, it came as a big surprise. However, not so much of the surprise as it was to the passerby who saw me. The police were called who in turn called the NSPCC who rescued me and took me to a nursery in South London.



Apparently, doorstep babies are very common on Christmas day which can ruin your Christmas or make it depending on your mood on the day. When Dolly Parton found one on her doorstep, it had a note attached that revealed the name of the baby was Jolene. She went on to have an international hit with a song, so it always pays to check your doorstep if you're a songwriter.

Over 77 books have been written about doorstep babies. But most have been fiction. 28 movies and TV episodes have featured doorstep babies. One of the most famous was Three Men and a Baby, that was a hit movie in the 1980s.

If you're a genuine doorstep baby, why not join our exclusive Club? You need to obtain your care records, which is the best way to find out because social workers are unlikely to tell you due to the distress they believe this may cause you. To make the right step and contact the Care Leavers Association, it will help you access your care records, there's never been a better time.

Roger

Care Leaver Voices

Mel Metcalfe writes about her treasured item from her time in care

Hello there,

Here are pictures of my treasured item and the story behind it! I was removed into care at birth and was placed into a foster placement for 18 months - whilst in this placement the foster carer Janet bought me a bear and on the bears hand was an apple 🍏 which she described me as her little Mel the little apple of her eye. Janet mothered me for 18 months until I was returned home back to my biological parents.

Janet loved me so much and it was deemed she loved me too much as a foster parent and this wasn't allowed back in the 90s and so this bond had to end. Janet always thought and wondered about me and my life. Janet always said I'd end up back in the system and if that was ever the case her door would be open.

Janet was right, I did end up back in care and lived my whole life in the system. She was sad to hear about my life. Growing up I had never had a photograph of myself as a baby and it wasn't until my 25th birthday and reading my social care files that I was able to meet Janet and during this visit she was able to give me my first ever baby photos and this beautiful teddy bear and the story behind it which is just beautiful 🥰 which I'll cherish forever ❤️

Mel



We invite you to share a treasured item from your childhood that you still hold dear—whether it's a beloved teddy bear, a sentimental letter, or an intriguing key. These items often carry memories that words cannot express, no matter how big or small. For a chance to be featured in an upcoming edition of Care Leavers Connected magazine, please send your stories to connected@careleavers.com

Care Leaver Culture

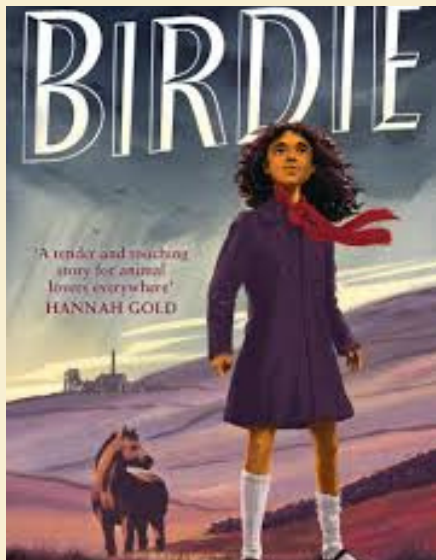
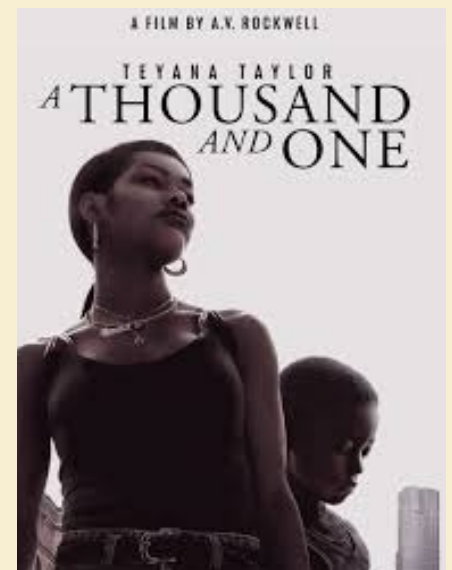


Podcast: How Do You Cope? With Elis & John

In the latest episode, writer and comedian Sophie Willan—who grew up in care—talks about her chaotic childhood, how she turned real-life struggles into the BAFTA-winning *Alma's Not Normal*, and why humour is a survival skill. If you like your deep conversations with a side of laughs, this one's for you. Listen [here](#)

Film: A Thousand and One

A raw and powerful drama about a mother who kidnaps her own son from the foster system to give him a better life. Heart-wrenching, eye-opening, and a reminder that sometimes, the system meant to protect can be the biggest battle of all. Keep the tissues handy. Watch the trailer [here](#)



Book: Birdie by J. P. Rose

Set in 1950s Yorkshire, *Birdie* follows a mixed-race girl sent to live with her great-aunt after growing up in care. Struggling to fit in, she finds an unlikely friend in Mr Duke, the village's last pit pony. As their bond grows, Birdie hatches a daring plan to save him. A heart warming story of identity, courage, and friendship. Buy the book [here](#)

If you want to see more care leavers in our culture, then head over to [Care Experience and Culture](#), a website created by Dr. Rosie Canning (UK) and Dr Dee Michell (Australia) who are care experienced scholars with a lifelong passion for reading.



Creative Corner

I take a lot of pride in what I am

This is a song chosen by Roger who shared his care story in this issue of the magazine. After retirement Roger took up live performance and this was a song he would often sing. It was originally written and recorded by American country music artist Merle Haggard and The Strangers. It was released in October 1968 as the only single from his album Pride in What I Am

Things I learned in a hobo jungle
Were things they never taught me in a classroom,
Like where to find a handout
While thumbin' through Chicago in the afternoon.
Hey, I'm not braggin' or complainin',
Just talkin' to myself man to man.
This ole' mental fat I'm chewin' didn't take alot of
doin'.
But I take a lot of pride in what I am.

I guess I grew up a loner,
I don't remember ever havin' any folks around.
But I keep thumbin' through the phone books,
And lookin' for my daddy's name in every town.
And I meet lots of friendly people,
That I always end up leavin' on the lam.
Where I've been or where I'm goin'
Didn't take a lot of knowin',
But I take a lot of pride in what I am.

I never travel in a hurry,
'Cause I got nobody waitin' for me anywhere.
Home is anywhere I'm livin',
If it's sleepin' on some vacant bench in City Square,
Or if I'm workin' on some road gang,
Or just livin' off the fat of our great land.
I never been nobody's idol, but at least I got a title,
And I take a lot of pride in what I am.

You can hear Merle Haggard's version [here](#)



Care Leavers Connected Magazine is produced by care leavers for care leavers. It is a safe space to share our stories, ambitions, and tips to support and celebrate everyone in our community. Please take the time to read through the magazine and give us any feedback. We want this to be a place that reflects our community, where people have a voice and can also find resources and connections. If you would like to be a part of the editorial board please get in touch.

Have you got a creative talent you want to share? Get in touch:

connected@careleavers.com

Cultural Competency

Are the cultural needs of young people in care being met ?

I lived in care for almost 18 years of my life, apart from a few months when I left care to go back and live with my mother and my other siblings.

Coming from a Nigerian background there were cultural needs to be met. Being shown how to look after your skin and hair while growing up is important. Cultural faith needs, clothing and food plays an integral role in your identity. As a black British West African in care, looking back there were certain aspects of a young child's cultural needs that were not often met.

For example, day to day routines of skin care and care of afro hair, the products that were required were not provided and there was a lack of awareness of these needs from those who were providing the care. This lack of knowledge could come down to the geographical placement of a child. Being placed in a mostly all white area meant that there was lack knowledge of different cultural needs.

Working in education

As a lecturer, working in education over the last few years, part of my teaching demographic was working with looked-after-children students from different backgrounds, faith, gender, ethnicity and cultural differences. It was apparent not all students would have their cultural needs met. This would bring up difficult and challenging situations for them. These issues came up in conversation with groups of students and individual students.

What I could see was very similar challenges that I faced in care. As an adult and a professional it was really important to make sure the young person was heard. Taking the time to listen to what was being said

and more importantly how the person felt. Things are changing from my time in care but I personally feel there is a long way to go.

This has always stuck in my mind

One of many examples was a young person practicing their Muslim faith. This was around the time of Ramadan where the young person would be fasting. This meant the family that the young person was living with may not have had a full understanding or be equipped to cater for the person's faith. This has always stuck in my mind. The student and others in the group who were in foster care or care homes share their challenges and hurdles focused round their faith as a practicing Muslim.



The conversation that followed with some of my students was this important part of their faith was sometimes met with resistance and the different timings of family meal times. This would sometimes alienate the person or prevent them from fully practicing their faith. This caused confusion, low self esteem and a feeling of not belonging.

This is one of many examples and as said above I can clearly identify with not having cultural needs met. As a society and people in care and foster care, these matters should be considered more often and supported. I am hoping that in 2025 organisations are becoming more

forward thinking and progressive in meeting a child's need in care. It good to started a conversation about issues that young people faced in the past and care experienced people are addressing them today and sharing their journey.

Adebayo

For those unsure what Ramadan and fasting is:



During this month, Muslims observe a strict fast from dawn until sunset. They are not allowed to eat or drink (even water) during daylight hours. Fasting is a private act of worship bringing about nearness to God, as well as a form of spiritual discipline and a means to empathize with those less fortunate. The fast is broken at the end of the day with prayer and a festive meal called an iftar. It is customary to visit family and friends following the iftar. For more information [click here](#).





My name is Jo and I am of Black Afro-Caribbean heritage and experienced being fostered from the age of four into a White British middle-class family.

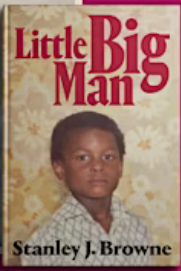
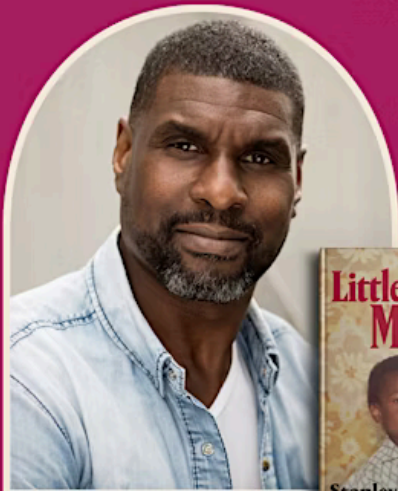
I'm looking to connect with CLA members particularly those of Black Afro-Caribbean heritage, who were fostered into a White (British) family and/or who grew up being the only person of colour in the town or city that they lived.

So I would really like to connect with others who may have the same lived experiences as myself, to share, support and discuss our journey through the foster care system and life afterwards.

If you are interested in being in touch with me then please email connected@careleavers.com and they will pass your message on to me.



BOOKS, BICKLE AND BREWS
PRESENTS



Stanley J. Browne
Little Big Man
MAY 22ND 2025
6:30PM
CARMELITE HOUSE
50 VICTORIA EMBANKMENT
EC4Y 0DZ

The one where mum and Elvis lived unhappily ever after in our little Stoke Newington Victorian townhouse. We are reading Little Big Man. You can register for this event [here](#)

Health and Wellbeing

Breathe Away Anxiety: The Power of Cyclic Sighing

Feeling stressed or anxious? Cyclic sighing is a breathing trick to help you relax and feel more grounded. You can do it anywhere, whether you're overwhelmed or just need a quick reset.

How to Do It

1. **Get Comfy:** Find a cosy spot to sit or lie down.
2. **Inhale Through Your Nose:** Take a slow, deep breath in. Pause briefly at the top.
3. **Sigh It Out:** Exhale slowly through your mouth with a satisfying sigh. Empty your lungs completely, then pause.
4. **Extend Your Exhale:** Without rushing to inhale, gently push your exhale further, adding a soft sigh or hum. Keep it natural.
5. **Repeat:** Do this a few times, aiming to lengthen the exhale each round. Feel the calm setting in.
6. **Set an Intention:** Inhale positivity (e.g., confidence) and exhale tension or worry.



Why It Works

Longer exhales activate your body's relaxation system, slowing your heart rate and easing tension.

Practicing regularly builds resilience, making it easier to handle stress. Quick Benefits Studies, like one from Stanford, show breathing exercises reduce anxiety and improve well-being. Best of all? It's quick, easy, and free.

Need a guide? [Watch this Cyclic Breathing for Beginners video by Andrew Huberman](#). It's a great way to get started. Make cyclic sighing part of your routine and take charge of your stress.

WAYS TO MAKE MENTAL HEALTH A PRIORITY

FOCUS ON
THE POSITIVE

BY FOCUSING ON THE POSITIVE, YOU CAN SHIFT YOUR MINDSET AND IMPROVE YOUR OVERALL WELL-BEING.

CONNECT
WITH OTHERS

SOCIAL CONNECTIONS ARE ESSENTIAL FOR OUR MENTAL HEALTH. MAKE AN EFFORT TO STAY IN TOUCH WITH FRIENDS.

RESPECT YOUR
BOUNDARIES

WHEN YOU PRIORITISE YOUR OWN NEEDS AND BOUNDARIES, YOU CAN REDUCE STRESS AND IMPROVE YOUR OVERALL WELL-BEING.

MAKE TIME FOR
YOURSELF

MAKE TIME IN YOUR SCHEDULE TO REST AND CULTIVATE ACTIVITIES YOU ARE PASSIONATE ABOUT, OUTSIDE OF WORK.

Policy and Practice

Introducing the Care Experienced Psychology Network

We are Jade and Helen, and we are both care experienced. In addition to our lived experiences, we are also qualified clinical psychologists, currently working in NHS mental health and local authority services across the UK.

We are writing to introduce the Care Experienced Psychology Network (CEPN) – a professional network for individuals in psychological professions, who are also care experienced. As care-experienced clinical psychologists, we have firsthand experience of the challenges and curiosities of navigating our personal and professional identities.

In 2023, we established the CEPN to create a space where members can both give and receive peer support as they navigate their own relationship with their care experience, all whilst working in psychological roles.

A safe network

We established the CEPN with the view of having a safe, compassionate, understanding network of care experienced peers navigating their own care experienced journeys and having supporting and nurturing conversations about this. We also recognised that care experienced people have ‘intersecting identities’ where multiple aspects of a person’s identity overlap and interact, shape experiences, perspectives and present individual challenges.

We are a voluntary run peer support network that aims to support pre and qualified psychological professionals working in the UK, who are care experienced. Although meetings are chaired, we believe in a collective leadership and we encourage all members to contribute to the ongoing direction of the network.



Dr Jade Weston



Dr Helen Ross

We also aim to offer mentoring support to aspiring psychologists in the early stages of their careers as we recognise that care experienced individuals often face disproportionate disadvantages in education, employment, and access to support compared to their non-care experienced peers.

We meet online on a monthly to two-monthly basis with a focus of peer support, reflective practice, mentoring, focus group discussions, to consult on university research projects as ‘experts by experience’, and discussions about working alongside other organisations. Network membership is free, and members are welcome to ‘drop in’ for discussions as and when they are able to attend.

We also hope that by naming our care experience and the need for the network we are working towards reducing external prejudice towards care leavers and challenging shame-based beliefs through connection and compassion.

If you would like to contact the CEPN to become a member, collaborate, or share research projects, please contact us on our email address: enquiries.cepn@gmail.com

How to Get Involved?

Get in touch

Phone: 0161 826 0214

Email: connected@careleavers.com

Address: The Care Leavers' Association
3rd Floor, Swan Buildings, 20 Swan Street,
Manchester, M4 5JW

Access to Records Call

You will now be able to book a 15 minute slot for a phone call with one of the team every Monday between 9am-1pm using the following [link](#) . You can also watch our Access to Records video guide [here](#).

Connected Zoom Groups

Join our next Care Leavers Connected Zoom meet-up on Monday 19th May to connect with other care leavers. These sessions start at 7.30pm. If you would like to join this session aimed at men [Sign up here](#)

Free data for all care leavers

Are you finding it hard to keep up with the cost of calls and need data? The CLA's "Keeping Care Leavers Connected", in collaboration with The Digital Inclusion Network. Get in touch.

Jim's Zoom Groups

Jim's sessions are on every first Wednesday of the month between 8-10pm. They sometimes have a topic for discussion and sometimes we just talk about any topic that care leavers who turn up want to raise. .

[Sign up here](#)

Leeds Gathering

There will be a meet-up for everyone who can make their way to Leeds on Saturday 17th May 2025, 2-4pm. All care leavers are welcome. If you want to come then please let us know by [registering here](#)

Older Care Leavers Project

A four-week programmes for care leavers 25+ focused on cooking, art, and photography. Designed to encourage creativity and connection, in a supportive environment. and aim to explore personal journeys.

Get in touch.

Campaign With Us

We are determined to ensure that care leaver issues are addressed by government. We want to make sure that care leavers have as good a life as possible. If you want to join us in campaigning, then get in touch.



*A massive thank you....
To the lovely lawyers from the
Macclesfield office of Anthony Collins
Solicitors who chose the CLA as the
charity to benefit from the proceeds of
their local art shows this year.*



Support Our Work!



If you simply don't have the time to get actively involved in the CLA, but you still want to support our work, you could think about making a donation. All donations will go towards helping the CLA to keep going and to running our projects and campaigns. Also, because the CLA is a registered charity, we can claim an extra 20% back from the government for every £1 you donate.



LOTTERY FUNDED

