

## Crystal-ball gazing

This issue of *KeyNotes* has been produced with one eye on the National Social Services Conference in October [see: *Leaving Care Diary*]. Rainer, with NLCAS colleagues, will be presenting a policy session on the education, training and employment of care leavers. This should be an opportunity to reach an audience who can ensure measures are in place to open up more opportunities for care leavers.

So, we have attempted something a bit different in this issue. We are in a period of potentially huge upheaval in the way that services for children and young people are delivered. The Children Bill, Children's Trusts and the contents of the forthcoming Youth Green Paper will all have an impact on our world. Recognising this, we asked people from as wide a range of perspectives as possible to do a bit of crystal-ball gazing and tell us their views on the future of leaving care. Some of their responses are in this issue; there will be more in the next. We hope you find them thought provoking.

I was not let off, and have been told to stare into my own crystal ball. When I did, the image was obvious but one we could easily lose sight of. Yes, the structures, locations and names of services may change, but what young people want from their social worker, personal advisor or key worker will not. They will still want relationships with workers and carers they can trust; accommodation that is safe and affordable; and the varieties of support they need to achieve their full potential.

Continuing to make progress in meeting these reasonable expectations will be a challenge. New structures ought to improve partnerships with other parts of the statutory and voluntary sectors. If better, more responsive universal services are the result, then care leavers can only benefit. We can realistically hope for better CAMHS and other health services. The Treasury review of financial arrangements for young people may lead to a more functional, rational system of support for care leavers.

I fear, however, that there is little to suggest that some of the areas currently causing difficulties will improve easily. Accommodation, both supported and move-on, is still a problem in many areas, and it is hard to see where improvements will come from.

Similarly, the difficulties we face in providing sensitive, sympathetic services to asylum seekers leaving care to enable them to become productive and fully participating members of society do not appear to be recognised or supported.

We can only keep working at it.

**Martin Hazlehurst**

## In this issue...

<b>Editorial</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Policy</b>	<b>2</b>
DfES: Five Year Strategy	2
2004 Spending Review	2
National 'out-of-authority' Protocol [England]	2
UK-wide policy meeting	2
Westminster Watch: Children Bill update	3
Care leavers to benefit from EMAs	3
Draft National Leaving Care Standards	3
New social exclusion website	3
Correction	3
<b>Future of Leaving Care</b>	<b>4</b>
Moving forward?	4
"Every Care Leaver Matters"	4
Delivering effective strategies	4
An ADSS perspective	5
"An optimistic view of the future"	5
After <i>Hillingdon</i>	5
The importance of being supportive	6
Independent advocacy?	6
'Whatever Next' in leaving care?	6
The Employability Programmes	7
<b>Practice</b>	<b>8</b>
A National Voice	8
An old approach to quality	8
<i>Stepping Out</i>	8
<b>News from Around the UK</b>	<b>9</b>
UK-wide leaving care contacts	9
Leaving care forum updates	10
<b>Leaving Care Diary</b>	<b>12</b>
APG meetings	12
National Social Services conference	12
National care leavers' week	12
"Positive Partnerships" conference	12
"Are we making a difference?"	12
NLCAS annual conference	12
<b>NLCAS Contacts</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Contributors</b>	<b>12</b>

# Policy

## DfES: Five Year Strategy for Children and Learners

On 8th July, the DfES presented to Parliament its five-year strategy for children's services and education. It reports on the Government's successes so far and sets out the analysis from which the DfES derived the five priorities underpinning their strategy. The analysis identifies as the UK's key weakness "the low participation of 16–19-year olds in education and training," which reinforces the adult-workforce skills deficit, and which reflects "a fundamental weakness in equality of opportunity."

The priorities are early intervention; improvements at primary school; creating secondary and further education that widens choice and prepares young people better for working life; reducing the adult-skills deficit; and "sustaining an excellent university sector."

Five principles of reform are set out, designed to achieve the "aim of world class public services for children, young people and adults." The principles are: greater personalisation and choice; opening up services to a diversity of provision and providers; freedom and independence for frontline headteachers, governors and managers [surely an argument in favour of amending the Children Bill to impose a duty on schools to ensure educational achievement]; staff development; and effective partnerships.

Running at over 100 pages, the document covers a lot of territory. It gives specific attention to disadvantaged young people, looked-after children and care leavers in the context of examining eight key reforms, but much of the detail of the proposals remains to be spelled out "over the next few months" in such documents as the Green Paper on Youth proposed to be published this autumn.

For now, young people leaving care are promised that the DfES will:

- Ensure absolute compliance with the Children (Leaving Care) Act
- Improve the consistency of financial support (EMAs, the Treasury review)
- Develop an improved mentoring system, especially when young people leave the care system
- Encourage more participation in ETE
- Ensure accommodation for care leavers during college or university holidays
- "Require from Local Authorities better and more consistent planning and support for young people leaving care, in particular to meet their accommodation needs and with related practical and emotional support." (pp.74–75)

By 2008, "[e]very young person leaving care will be getting the services they need to support them in the transition to adulthood." (p.78) Challenging times!

See: [www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/5yearsstrategy](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/publications/5yearsstrategy)

## 2004 Spending Review

The 2004 Spending Review, covering the period from 2005–06 to 2007–08, was presented to Parliament on 12th July. It includes plans for funding the proposals described in the DfES five-year strategy so that average funding per pupil will be more than double what it was in 1997. Additional resources of £769 million are confirmed for childcare and services for disadvantaged children by 2007–08, compared with 2004–05.

The review is available at: [www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending\\_review/spend\\_sr04/spend\\_sr04\\_index.cfm](http://www.hm-treasury.gov.uk/spending_review/spend_sr04/spend_sr04_index.cfm)

## National Protocol [England] for 'out of authority' care leavers

The National Protocol on inter-authority arrangements for care leavers resident outside of their responsible authority [LASSL (2004) 20] has been published. Agreed by the DfES Leaving Care Project Group and the Association of Directors of Social Services, it is designed to be a model for managing joint working arrangements between local authorities where a care leaver who is the responsibility of one authority is living in another.

The DfES accompanying note states that local authorities with existing inter-authority protocols may retain them at their own discretion and subject to their acceptance by partner authorities. The National Protocol is designed to support authorities where one or both of the respective agencies do not have such an agreement. The DfES and ADSS consider that this protocol represents a minimum standard of joint working required to implement the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000.

National protocol:

[www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/72/73/04087273.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/72/73/04087273.pdf)

Accompanying note:

[www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/72/78/04087278.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/72/78/04087278.pdf)

Letter from ADSS:

[www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/72/79/04087279.pdf](http://www.dh.gov.uk/assetRoot/04/08/72/79/04087279.pdf)

## UK-wide policy meeting

The following report was written by Alison Caulfield-Dow

On 17th & 18th June, 20 representatives from across the UK came together in Glasgow to discuss the impact of leaving-care policy and practice developments. This was the third bi-annual meeting, an informal way to catch up with counterparts in England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales.

# Westminster Watch

## > Children Bill update

The Children Bill finished its progress through the Lords on the 15th July. The peers – particularly Baroness Ashton, who led for the Government – spent a generous amount of time debating the bill, which has been improved in a number of areas.

So far, the bill has been strengthened to ensure that the Commissioner for Children will now promote and safeguard the rights and interests of children in England, rather than just listen to them. Youth offending teams have been included in the list of partners who have a duty to co-operate to improve the wellbeing of children, which is an important development and one that Rainer pushed for. Schools, however, are not included in the list – a significant problem for young people in care, particularly if the Government increases school autonomy. The Immigration and Nationality Directorate are also absent from the list, suggesting that asylum-seeking and refugee children and young people are somehow different to the rest.

The Government were convinced by the arguments of Rainer and others that care leavers, young learning disabled people, and young people in custody should be included

within the remit of the Children's Commissioner. However, the amendment failed to be made on a technicality, and so we must hope that the Commons recognises the importance of older young people who receive services under children's legislation having equal recourse to the Children's Commissioner – and particularly so for young people who were looked after by local authorities.

There was also much debate about the proposed duty on local authorities to promote the educational attainment of looked-after children. Although the Government have promised to reinforce, in Guidance, the importance of giving governors and teachers the right kind of advice and training to support looked-after children, they stopped short of accepting amendments that would extend this duty to schools and colleges.

The bill has now been passed to the Commons, where debate will begin once the House returns from its break on 7th September. The Government will be under pressure to push the bill through at some speed, and it is possible that hard-won amendments will be thrown out. NLCAS and Rainer colleagues will be lobbying hard to ensure the best outcomes for young people.

Presentations, document sharing and lively discussion around emerging issues gave us a sense of how developments are taking shape across the UK. We also had useful discussions with policy makers from the DfES and Scottish Executive.

The Scottish Throughcare & Aftercare Forum organised this year's meeting. We hope that we can continue to expand our UK networks and regularly share relevant information.

*Notes from the meeting can be downloaded at:*  
**[www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk](http://www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk)** (Policy & Practice site)

## Care leavers to benefit from EMAs

From September this year, young people will be able to receive up to £30 a week if they continue studying after their GCSEs. The Government is expanding the Educational Maintenance Allowance (EMA) throughout England, and young people who are, or have been, looked after by the local authority will be entitled to the highest rate.

In the first year of the national scheme, all young people aged 16 planning to continue their education in school or college from September 2004 can apply for an EMA. In existing EMA pilot areas, young people in Years 13 and 14 from September can also apply. Visit **[www.dfes.gov.uk/financialhelp/ema](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/financialhelp/ema)** for more information about how to apply.

## Draft National Leaving Care Standards

Work on the draft DfES National Standards for Leaving Care has continued over the summer, with many Regional Forums, the National Leaving Care Benchmarking Forum and A National Voice commenting on drafts. The working group of the DfES Leaving Care Project Team is now matching the appropriate legislation, regulations, guidance and research to each of the Standards, with the intent of completing the work before the end of the year. For a copy of the draft Standards, call NLCAS on 020 8808 6127 or email [amanda.gibson@raineronline.org](mailto:amanda.gibson@raineronline.org).

## New social exclusion website

The Social Exclusion Unit has a new website, with useful materials on many aspects of social exclusion, including children and young people. See: **[www.socialexclusion.gov.uk](http://www.socialexclusion.gov.uk)**

## Correction

In "National Data Sharing Protocol," which appeared in *Policy*, Issue 31, Mark Burrows' telephone number was wrong, as the result of an editing fault. It should have read: 020 7972 4283. We apologise to callers, who had to be redirected.

# Future of Leaving Care

“The time has come,” the Walrus said, “to talk of many things....”

## Moving forward?

I have been fortunate in being able to observe the national development of care-leaving services since the Children (Leaving Care) Act. When I left local government to join the (then) Department of Health in May 2001, arrangements were already in hand for the commencement of the Act in October. The Act and the Quality Protects programme ensured that the needs of young people in care are firmly on the agenda of central government and of the councils with direct responsibility for their wellbeing.

The Act has resulted in real benefits for care leavers. The trend to discharge young people from care prematurely at the age of 16 with little preparation has now been reversed. Councils are staying in touch with the majority of young people up until they are 21. At least 81% of young people at age 19 are living in suitable accommodation. As the Act was being debated, MPs and professionals expressed reservations about the local authority income-maintenance role for 16–17 year olds. These have proved unfounded – generally, councils have provided “relevant” young people with reliable financial support more closely related to their needs.

However, even the best leaving-care services will struggle to provide the right kind of support to young people with traumatic pasts, whose difficulties have often been compounded by multiple placement moves and inconsistent care experiences. Further, although there are excellent leaving-care services in every region, there remains too much variation between councils. It may often be difficult to justify why one care leaver’s corporate parent is less generous than that of their friend, whose support is the responsibility of the next-door authority.

We need to continue to think more carefully about our approach to caring for young people when they enter and remain in care. All agencies responsible for children’s wellbeing – social services, schools and the NHS – still have to really listen and respond to young people, their families and their carers. The changes proposed by the Green Paper *Every Child Matters* and included in the current Children Bill are intended to create a framework to encourage the development of integrated approaches to meeting children’s needs. A strong sense of corporate responsibility and partnership will have to be maintained to continue to make meaningful improvements for future generations of care leavers. Three years on from the Children (Leaving Care) Act there can be no justification for complacency.

### Mark Burrows

DfES Professional Advisor, Looked After Children Strategy

## “Every Care Leaver Matters”

Clearly, *Every Child Matters* and the Children Bill are going to preoccupy local authorities in the immediate and foreseeable future. Here in Norfolk our leaving-care sector has adopted “Every Care Leaver Matters” as our banner for responding to both national and local consultations and proposals. It’s going to be important for all of us to do our best to promote the interests of care leavers in such a far-reaching initiative.

In implementing the new legislation, I hope that we can learn from the positive experiences of *Me? Survive? Out There?* and the Children (Leaving Care) Act. A key lesson has been the impact that young people’s voices have had (and continue to have) on policy makers. Young people themselves will be the best advocates for what is best and most effective in leaving care. We in local government don’t always find it easy or comfortable to engage with young people in developing policy and services, and our challenge is to develop real partnerships with them and ensure that we are listening and responsive corporate parents.

Despite the huge implications of the Children Bill, we have to remember that life goes on. The Action on Aftercare Consortium’s report *Setting the agenda: what’s left to do in leaving care?* does what it says on the tin – identifies the significant agenda that still faces young people leaving care and those who support them day-to-day. It’s dangerous to pick and choose from the report’s menu, but I would like to see us prioritising the training and support of carers, particularly foster carers, to enable them to prepare and support our young people more effectively for their transition to adult life.

### Stewart Betts

County Manager – Leaving Care, Norfolk Social Services, and Local Government Association Adviser on Leaving Care

## Delivering effective strategies

In 2002, the Department of Health, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister and Centrepoint produced *Care leaving strategies: a good practice handbook*. The handbook identifies key issues to be considered by local authorities and the agencies that work with them when developing strategies to meet the housing and support needs of young people leaving care.

The key issues remain the same today. High on the list are the importance of extending the role of corporate parenting across the whole local authority and relevant partner agencies; involving young people and local service providers in the design, delivery and evaluation of leaving care services; and ensuring that services are flexible and built upon a thorough assessment of need.

Effective and appropriate pathway plans are fundamental to support young people leaving care to move successfully into

independence in adulthood. Where possible, appropriate accommodation should be provided. Joint protocols between social services and housing departments should also deliver effective, planned and safe moves into supported and independent accommodation, based on young people's wishes and personal development rather than their age.

*Electronic copies of Care leaving strategies:*

[www.dfes.gov.uk/qualityprotects/pdfs/care\\_strategies.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/qualityprotects/pdfs/care_strategies.pdf)

*Hard copies: tacklinghomelessness@odpm.gsi.gov.uk*

### **Charles Chappell**

Head of Whitehall Policy Team, Homelessness and Housing Support Directorate, Office of the Deputy Prime Minister

## **An ADSS perspective**

Before looking to the future, it's worth taking stock of the recent past because there's genuine cause for congratulation and optimism. As ever, there are difficulties in the *consistency* of improvements, but the combined effects of the Quality Protects programme and especially the Children (Leaving Care) Act have markedly improved services for care leavers. There are now established, inter-agency services for virtually all local authorities providing dedicated support to most care leavers. There is increasing evidence that the average age young people physically leave care has increased, that Pathway Plans are in place and generally effective, that the overwhelming majority of care leavers are "in touch" with staff or services, and that increasing numbers are engaged in education, employment or training.

It would be an offence to care leavers to imply that everything's fine now. Clearly it isn't. Educational attainment is a major concern requiring more sophisticated collective responses. Prospects for most care leavers therefore remain severely challenging. Local practice is still too variable, even to the apparently simple issue of levels of financial support. But much has been achieved, particularly through the hard work of frontline staff and care leavers themselves.

As for the future we see significant opportunities, but they are balanced against potential risks. Three areas worth highlighting are the impact of the Children Bill, resources, and housing.

- The aims of the Children Bill (and the Green Paper) are welcomed by ADSS because they address universal as well as targeted need and because they focus upon outcomes. But care leavers are a minority group, and we must constantly remind colleagues and policy makers that children leaving care embody outcomes for all children: if we're getting the right outcomes for care leavers, we're probably getting them for all children. That's a message that could get lost if we don't promote it. The momentum of the leaving-care legislation may get overtaken by the new legislative drive. Also, where the Bill leads to structural reform, we must build mechanisms to address the needs of care leavers who are in transition between children's and adult social services. That divide may be harder to cross in future. But the enhanced duty of local authorities to address the educational needs of children looked after has to be a plus for future care leavers.

- The removal of ring fencing for leaving-care grants will provide more flexibility for most, but presents a risk to some, where other budgets are under severe pressure. We will need to watch carefully to ensure that minimum standards are consistently maintained.
- Ensuring decent affordable accommodation for care leavers remains an issue that has been arguably neglected in our implementation of the legislation, and is an issue set to become more fraught with the continued changes in the national housing market and the knock-on effect on social housing. There are positive examples, ranging from foyers to young people's versions of "extra care housing". But access seems variable and may require more dedicated attention. ADSS welcomes A National Voice's survey of that issue.

So overall, some good progress, but we need to sustain it.

### **John Coughlan**

Co-Chair, ADSS Children and Families Committee

## **"An optimistic view of the future"**

Care leavers by definition have come through a lot and, when it comes to actually leaving care, support is patchy and it seems to be like a lottery. Some care leavers get good support and others don't. I would like to see national standards so that everyone gets the same.

I also think that there should be a free 24-hour support line as there are times when I just need to talk to someone about my situation, and I often find night times the hardest of all. I'd like one free number I could call for emotional support at 3am and for info about my rights and entitlements and sign posting.

**Sam**, a Care Leaver (aged 19), A National Voice

## **After Hillingdon**

Since the judgement in *Berhe & Others v the London Borough of Hillingdon*, dispute over the nature of the duties owed to unaccompanied asylum-seeking young people who were previously looked after by local authorities continues.

Many local authorities now accept that the vast majority of unaccompanied children in their care should be accommodated under Section 20 of the Children Act 1989, but some have been reluctant to rectify previous errors and review their present and past caseloads. Unless this is done, there will still be children and young people in need of assistance who will be excluded from the protection of the leaving-care provisions. This is particularly important where the child or young person is under the care of a psychiatrist or counsellor and has demonstrable psychiatric and emotional needs.

Some local authorities have also failed to take into account the fact that 17- and 18-year-olds who were previously looked after cannot access welfare benefits even if they have been granted Humanitarian Protection or exceptional or discretionary leave and will still need to be assisted by their responsible authority. A support deficit can also arise where a young person of 19 and

over is in full-time education. Young asylum seekers who progress to university or other higher-education courses also face the prospect of having to pay “overseas student” fees whilst at the same time they are not permitted to work and have no access to any support apart from that provided by NASS. Again in this situation it may be appropriate for their local authority to provide them with a grant as a “qualifying” or “formerly relevant” young person to cover their fees.

In providing this assistance the local authority will be honouring its obligations as a surrogate parent to back up any shortfall in income that the young people cannot meet on their own.

#### **Nadine Finch**

2 Garden Court, Middle Temple

*[Nadine Finch was a barrister in the Hillingdon case]*

## **The importance of being supportive**

Just as you were getting comfortable with the new laws, policies, protocols and terminology of the Children (Leaving Care) Act, along came a new challenge to rise to – young people leaving care who came to this country as unaccompanied children seeking asylum.

On the one hand, you can sleep easy knowing that you are not the one with the huge responsibility of determining whether the young person is given leave to stay in the UK and if so, for how long. On the other hand, you have to assess, plan with and provide support for a young person whose future is largely out of their hands. This is in the context of a constantly changing policy environment and resources stretched to the limit.

Forecasting policy in the world of asylum and immigration is at times both pointless and too gloomy to bear thinking about. We presume that things will get tougher for these young people as they are affected by government policies that aim to make it increasingly difficult for asylum seekers to reach and stay on our safe shores. The impact of negative media coverage only exacerbates their difficulties as they try to make their way around the complex social and economic minefield that is the UK.

Many fear their 18th birthday as a time when their future becomes more uncertain and they are treated as adults by those with the power to determine their future. We must not underestimate the importance of an understanding individual, who can provide support through all the difficulties. Never did these young people need a leaving-care service more. That's one thing that won't be changing soon.

#### **Judith Dennis**

Policy Adviser – Unaccompanied Children, Refugee Council

## **Independent advocacy?**

The draft DfES leaving-care standard on involvement and advocacy states amongst other things that there should be effective, independent and accessible advocacy services for care leavers that are regularly reviewed and evaluated.

The Children (Leaving Care) Act guidance stressed the importance of advocacy for care leavers making a complaint.

This has been strengthened since 1st April 2004, when the legal right to advocacy introduced by the 2002 Adoption and Children Act for care leavers (as well as looked after children and those in need) making a Children Act complaint came into force. The new right covers young people who are thinking about making a complaint or wishing to make representations for change without the need to frame this as a formal complaint.

Disappointingly the issue of independence has been fudged, and there is no clear requirement that advocacy should be independent of the local authority. There is some recognition in the guidance, *Get it Sorted*, that young people in authorities which have an in-house children's rights service should where possible be offered a choice of an outside advocate.

[www.dfes.gov.uk/childrensadvocacy/docs/GetitSorted.pdf](http://www.dfes.gov.uk/childrensadvocacy/docs/GetitSorted.pdf)

In our experience most London authorities are developing their advocacy services to meet the new requirement, and some authorities with in-house services are contracting to independent agencies for advocacy.

Our experience of the operation of the Leaving Care Act is based both on what young people tell us and on what we observe in advocating on their behalf. Inevitably it is the bad news that we hear. The majority of our enquiries come from 18-plus 'former relevant' young people who are unclear about their entitlements and for whom there is inconsistent planning. The following illustrates some of the main trends we have observed:

- Young people having to leave their foster carers at 18
- Those placed outside their home authority having to move back in at 18 to secure a tenancy
- Homelessness because of placement breakdown or unsuitability
- Inconsistent leaving-care grants
- Lack of clarity about what financial help is available
- Lack of consistent financial support packages across the authority for young people in education and training and uncertainty about what is being offered
- No additional support to supplement student loans, and
- Difficulties concerning immigration status, which frequently has not been resolved prior to turning 18, and lack of understanding and support about the transition to NASS.

Above all, services to young people since April 2004 have deteriorated and in some ways the benefits of the new system have all but been lost with the ending of ring-fenced funding.

#### **Nicola Wyld**

Legal and Policy Officer, Voice for the Child in Care

## **'Whatever Next' in leaving care?**

Whilst much is still to be done to improve the transition process to adulthood for young disabled people, more radical and empowering approaches are being developed. These are based on working with young people to break down the significant barriers that societal attitudes place in their way. Energy, time

and resources are focussed on finding alternative ways to engage with young people, paying due attention to methods of communication and information-giving, choice, and putting the needs of the young person first.

Person-centred approaches to transition planning being developed under 'Valuing People' have resulted in new tools that support young disabled people in developing the skills and confidence to become self-determined adults.<sup>1</sup>

One such initiative is Trans-active. Using multi-media materials produced by Mencap, young people with learning disabilities explore their thoughts and choices about the future with a peer supporter. They develop their own electronic 'passport' in school using a dedicated website and all materials can be updated, printed and securely stored. ([www.trans-active.org.uk](http://www.trans-active.org.uk))

Direct payments to 16- and 17-year-olds (Carers and Disabled Children Act 2000) provide the opportunity for young disabled people to manage their personal assistance in meeting their support needs. The growth of self-advocacy schemes demonstrates the powerful impact that peer support can have in enabling young disabled people to develop positive identities and to be supported by those who have learned to take positive control of their lives.

Innovative projects and materials are in evidence that can help develop further education, training and employment opportunities for disabled care leavers whilst providing them with the proper support mechanisms to take them up. Who Cares? Trust's 'Employability Plus' materials are an excellent example (see below).

Person-centred approaches and materials, applied to the pathway planning process by appropriately trained staff, can only encourage more ownership and cooperation from young people, thus generating more successful outcomes. The support of young disabled people leaving care should be viewed as an opportunity to add new tools to the toolbox, developing skills and expertise to support all young people to achieve independent and fulfilled adult lives.

### Julie Harris

People-Key Consulting

Author, *Future Positive: A resource guide for people working with disabled care leavers* (DfES: forthcoming)

<sup>1</sup> See (2002) *Valuing People: Towards Person Centred Approaches. Planning with People – Guidance for Implementation Groups.* ([www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/PCPGuidance.htm](http://www.valuingpeople.gov.uk/PCPGuidance.htm))

## The Employability Programmes

The Who Cares? Trust piloted two programmes to improve the education, training and employment outcomes of young people in and preparing to leave the care system. The Employability Programme (2000–2002) was concerned with those receiving mainstream services from leaving-care teams and the Connexions Service. The Employability Plus Programme (2002–2004) was targeted at young people with learning difficulties who needed considerable additional support.

Early indications from the research into the implementation of

the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 are that leaving-care teams and Connexions workers are helping young people to consider their options, realise their aspirations for the future, and work towards further education, training and employment.

The Who Cares? Trust's employment programmes have highlighted some issues worthy of further consideration:

- > **Accommodation and finance** Accommodation and financial worries are a recurring theme for young people leaving the care system.
  - > **Transport** It is extremely difficult for young people, particularly in rural communities, to access and afford public transport. They need transport to and from work, college and leisure activities. Without this they will be further isolated and denied opportunities. Transport needs to be costed and seen as an integral part of service provision.
  - > **Leisure** Involvement in leisure activities is key to improving young people's self-confidence and self-esteem. Leisure activities provide unique opportunities for social interaction, team building and the chance for young people from the care system to integrate with their peers. Young people in care repeatedly say that they feel stigmatised by being pigeon-holed. Leisure activities need to be costed and seen as an integral part of service provision.
  - > **Work experience** Work experience within local authorities and local communities provides young people with opportunities to experiment in a variety of settings, and discover where their strengths and interests lie. Communities need to be encouraged to recognise that young people from their area, who may have been in care, have skills and qualities that they can contribute alongside their peers. Well-informed local employers, in our experience, are very willing to give the young people a chance. However, unless young people are properly prepared, willing participants and well supported throughout, work experience could be a damaging experience, particularly to their self-esteem and confidence.
  - > **Early Preparation** Foster-care and residential-care providers need to prepare young people better for further education, training and employment at an earlier point than transition to leaving-care teams.
- The majority of children develop the skills and qualities needed to enjoy adult life through experiences and observation in their daily lives at home with their families, in school and at leisure. The process of socialisation, learning and development is not so evident in public care, especially with regard to helping young people to acquire positive feelings of self-esteem, high expectations of themselves and aspirations for their future.
- > **Practice Materials** Details about the employment programmes, or copies of materials, tel: 020 7017 2781/2782; email: [jenny.robson@thewhocarestrust.org.uk](mailto:jenny.robson@thewhocarestrust.org.uk); [grainne.sinclair@thewhocarestrust.org.uk](mailto:grainne.sinclair@thewhocarestrust.org.uk)

**Jenny Robson**, Director of Development  
**Grainne Sinclair**, Project Co-ordinator (Development)  
The Who Cares? Trust

# I Practice

## A National Voice

After job interviews led by young people, ANV are happy to welcome Tommy Foley as our third paid worker. Tommy will be our Southern Development Worker, based at Prince's Trust HQ in London (tel: 020 7543 7320; email: Tomas.Foley@princes-trust.org.uk). He was a volunteer and sat on the Management Committee of ANV for several years, so he brings to the post a great understanding of our work.

On 25th October, during National Care Leavers' Week [see: *Leaving Care Diary*], ANV will launch a national campaign to raise awareness of the state of housing for care leavers. Our "No Place Like Home" campaign aims to improve access to good quality housing and ongoing support. We know that 1 in 5 of all 30-year-olds are still living at home. In England the average age of leaving home for young people is the mid-20s, and even after that many still get emotional, practical and financial support from their parents. This is in stark contrast to care leavers – who leave care at an earlier age and can often feel isolated and under-supported.

As part of the campaign, we created three questionnaires about the housing situation and how to improve it. To help the campaign, please complete the appropriate questionnaire (for care leavers, housing workers, and leaving-care workers and Personal Advisors) by visiting our website, [www.anationalvoice.org](http://www.anationalvoice.org). Closing date, 1st October.

Our "This Is Not A Suitcase" campaign is progressing well. We are trying to encourage local authorities to put an end to 'bin bagging,' and we recently sent out 376 suitcases across England after a generous donation from Safeway's.

ANVNET is a new project, which we hope to pilot with a few local authorities in the North West soon. We will provide each authority with their own page on our website, which can be updated by young people on a monthly basis. It is hoped that local service information, including service provision and a 'What's On' board as well as access to a national web forum via ANV, will create a national network for ANV members. We will also be using SMS text messaging to poll our members and keep them up to date with progress in the world of care.

**Maxine Wrigley**, National Co-Ordinator

## An old approach to quality

A caseload of three young people for each support worker. Up to 20 hours direct-contact time a week with a young person if needed. Helping young people learn how to make positive choices about their future as a central plank of all its work. Management decisions that have swept away all unnecessary paperwork, desks and non-contact time, and have allowed support workers to do what it is they came into the work for: to work directly with some of the most under-supported young people and to make a real and sustainable difference to their lives.

Does this sound like a dream project? Well, it is not. It is a real project, and is being run now by Rainer Wigan. It is a rather old-fashioned idea of spending more time 'doing it' than ticking boxes about it. It is about providing staff and service users with encouragement, support and a more creative way of spending their time on earth than the dull bureaucracy that kills so much of the joy of living.

Rainer Wigan is funded by the Supporting People programme. We provide no accommodation; no weekly income; have no statutory power. We work almost entirely on a one-to-one basis. We promise nothing but to 'walk alongside a service user and help them learn to make decisions that will give them a better quality of survival'. In other words, we have nothing to offer but ourselves.

But this is the key. The relationship is entirely voluntary. It is the quality of the relationship that is having what many partner agencies see as a positive effect.

Of the 50 referrals we took in the first year (with an equal gender split), 22% were from Probation; 22%, self-referrals; and the remainder from the Youth Offending Team, Aftercare and other support providers. Most are aged between 16 and 22 years old.

In one example, during 12 weeks we did 70 contacts, gave 211 hours direct work, and worked on 14 pre-planned issues 283 times. There were only five no-shows by the young person, and three of these were because of chaos living in a B&B. With this kind of support we have seen prolific offenders become crime-free for over a year; chaos turn to stability; and poor health improved as support is given accessing doctors and dentists.

We take a very simple, practical approach. We try to care for and empower our service users (we do not allow the term 'client'). We expect nothing less than we would for our own children or for ourselves. We try to build up their self-esteem in every contact – even a small seed of something positive can be amplified to help young people see the good in themselves.

Most important though, we try to provide all the information young people need to make 'their own' choices – and then respect their decisions.

It can be done – it's just having the will to fight for it.

**Chris Langhorn**

Service Manager, Rainer Wigan

## Stepping Out

Our reprinted *Stepping Out* guide is a must-have for all care leavers. This practical handbook tells young people all they need to know about the vital aspects of living independently.

The sections provide care leavers with information about their rights and options, as well as guidance, advice and full contact details of organisations that can give further information. Young people can insert their own important documents, and the guide can be easily customised to include local information.

*Stepping Out, Fostering Network, 105 pages (A5), code 7196, £6.50, is available from Central Books, tel: 0845 458 9910.*

**Ena Fry**

# News from Around the UK

## UK-wide leaving care contacts

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### > West Midlands Managers

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Website: www.nwacf.com  
(with discussion forum)

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### > Northern Ireland

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### > National

The Action on Aftercare Consortium serves as the National Forum for the Regional Aftercare Forums.

**Contact: AOAC Chair, Jane Sufian**  
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# News from Around the UK – continued

## Leaving care forum updates

### > London & SE

Monthly meetings continue to be well represented, and we have lively topics for discussion.

The needs of asylum seekers continually exercise our thinking in this region; so as always we were pleased to have Judith Dennis, Refugee Council, join us in July. She provided an update on recent developments, and a chance for us to share issues and concerns and to assist the Refugee Council to work on everyone's behalf to shift attitudes and practices. Please feel free to contact us if you would like the excellent handouts provided by Judith.

In August we held a training day on Mental Health and Care Leavers, delivered by Young Minds in the venue of the year – the new extension of the Houses of Parliament. Once we had gained access, 26 of us had an excellent day. The focus was on wellbeing and provided an opportunity to reflect on our practice and learn from others.

September's meeting will focus on the Integrated Children's System and pathway planning – fortunately, Richmond is a pilot authority so are able to share their experience with us.

Our dream of having two regional workers is beginning to become a reality. In relation to a worker for SE and Eastern regions we are moving forward slowly but surely, in no small part thanks to Jo Blake, our regional QP Development Worker.

Remember, any colleagues from "out of town" in London on the first Tuesday of the month are always welcome to join us at Kensington & Chelsea Town Hall from 10.30 to 12.30 – September meeting will be in the library, not the main building.

Ena Fry

### > East & SE

There are two care leaving networks that cover South East and East of England, a total of 29 councils. Each meets quarterly and covers a range of operational and strategic issues around services to care leavers.

Recent work across both groups includes a survey using the "viewpoint" software, which invited young people and professionals to give their views on how the Children (Leaving Care) Act is working.

The results have now been collated, and the reports are available from Cheryl.Hall@dfes.gsi.gov.uk The main

messages are from young people themselves, who are expressing forthright views on how services could be improved. Most suggestions are simple and would be easy to implement, so it is hoped Councils will take these on board.

South East group are doing an audit of links between care leaving services and Connexions, and are looking at examples of working protocols between the two services. The group have also signed up to a regional agreement about how to deal with requests for services from care leavers who move to other South East councils. Date of next meeting is 14th September in London.

East have done some work around the interface between care leaving and Supporting People and identified a number of issues that need addressing. Date of next meeting: 1st September in Huntingdon.

Work is progressing on getting support and financial commitment for the creation of a specialist development post for leaving care. Details have yet to be worked out, but there appears to be broad agreement across both regions about the value of such a role. Watch this space!

Jo Blake

### > East Midlands

Meetings of the regional network are quarterly. The last meeting was on 22nd July 2004.

We discussed and have since fed back on the draft Leaving Care Standards. Work led by Dr Bob Broad (De Montfort University) with a number of councils continues – this is researching effective practice with a view to wider dissemination. A lot of research has identified the areas of concern – we decided to identify successful practice and look in depth at what leads to successful outcomes.

We are currently focusing on the issue of 'suitable accommodation,' and will be having this as an item next time to discuss the points arising from the pro-forma that everyone is completing for circulation in advance. We will also be following up on our CAMHS discussions by inviting the CAMHS Regional Development Worker and CAMHS colleagues from each authority area to the meeting.

Our next meeting is on 20th October at Catalis Centre, Derby: 12.30 for lunch, followed by meeting 1–4pm.

Tony Dewhurst

## > Yorkshire/Humberside & Northern

The main focus of the Forums in both regions has continued to be the preparations for the employment of a Regional Leaving Care Development Co-ordinator. Julie Mepham, who until recently was Service Manager for leaving care in Sheffield, takes up the post at the beginning of September. She will be line-managed by Mike Sutcliffe (Projects and Commissioning Manager at the NLCAS) and will be a very welcome addition to the NLCAS team. Her work plan will be set and reviewed by a Steering Group of representatives from the two regions.

On 15th June, members of the two Forums met together to look in detail at the work plan for Julie's first year in post. What emerged was a clear set of priority areas for Julie to work on and clear agreements about how she will carry out her role. We will report on this in future issues. This was the first time the two Forums had met together. In future, there will be two joint meetings a year, primarily to review progress on the key issues identified in Julie's work plan.

**Mike Sutcliffe**

## > Scotland

Since April 2004, Scottish local authorities have been getting to grips with the new Regulations and Guidance for young people leaving care. We have seen lots of positive service developments as a result of these new national policies. The emphasis is now on monitoring these developments and gaining ongoing feedback on the actual outcomes for young people.

The Forum has organised a series of training opportunities to promote the latest policy and practice developments. This includes mini-seminars on the new Pathways framework for assessment and planning. Further information can be found on our website.

The Forum launched its new policy & practice website at the end of June. The aim is to provide a one-stop point of contact for relevant throughcare & aftercare information. We increasingly hope to encourage interactive discussion on a wide range of topics and Forum activities. Go to: [www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk](http://www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk)

Finally, the Forum's Annual Conference & AGM will be at Crieff Hydro Hotel, Perthshire, on Thursday 2nd and Friday 3rd December. This year's event is likely to be our biggest yet and we would be happy to welcome any contacts from across the UK. We hope to promote more involvement from

young people and have a range of informative and interactive sessions, including a pre-conference dinner on Wed. 1st December. Booking details will be available in September.

**Alison Caulfield-Dow**

## > Wales

Wales Leaving Care Forum is made up of representatives from all 22 Welsh local authorities, including voluntary agency partners who have an interest in, or who help to deliver, services to young people leaving care. A representative from the Welsh Assembly Government also attends the Forum, providing a vital link to the heart of regional Government, enabling the Forum to have a voice in informing and shaping local policy decisions.

Since the last edition of *KeyNotes* the Wales Forum has held its AGM. Key goals for the next year include:

- Working towards developing a regional development worker post, such as those established in other parts of the UK
- Organising regional events as part of National Care Leavers' Week in October.
- Establishing closer links with the ADSS in Wales to ensure leaving-care issues remain on the agenda from both a strategic and operational perspective.
- Work in partnership with the Welsh Assembly Government Children and Families Division, to organise a series of events raising the profile of care leavers linked to best practice and latest research.

Guest speakers have included Keir Parsons from the NW After Care Forum and Mike Sutcliffe from NLCAS sharing information about how they helped to establish regional development worker posts, and Janet Rich from the Bryn Melyn Group Foundation talking about the valuable work of this organisation and National Care Leavers' Week.

Progress has been made with the endorsement by the ADSS in Wales of a cross-boundary protocol for care leavers who move between authorities that has been long overdue.

The Wales Forum now has a representative (Paula Foley) who regularly attends the Action on Aftercare Consortium meetings.

Next meeting: 12th October.

**Steve Driscoll**

# Leaving Care Diary

## APG meetings

The next meetings of the Associate Parliamentary Group (APG) for Children and Young People In and Leaving Care, chaired by Hilton Dawson MP, are: 15th September, 20th October, 17th November and 15th December. Young people in and leaving care are particularly welcome to attend. *Queries to Yvonne Wood, tel: 020 7251 3117; email: mailbox@thewhocarestrust.org.uk.*

## 20th–22nd October: National Social Services Conference

The theme this year is: "Communities that Care, Services that Deliver". The event will take place at Civic Centre, Newcastle. See: [www.adss.org.uk/events/2004/conf04.shtm](http://www.adss.org.uk/events/2004/conf04.shtm)

## 25th–31st October: National care leavers' week

"Housing" is the theme of National Care Leavers' Week 2004. Some of the events planned for venues around the country:

- a lunchtime event in central London on the 25th to launch ANV's "No Place Like Home" campaign, to be followed in the afternoon by a best-practice seminar for policy makers and senior practitioners, which will be run by Rainer. *More details will be available at [www.raineronline.org](http://www.raineronline.org)*
- a conference in London on the 26th
- an event organised by the North West After Care Forum.

*Details from: [www.brynmelyngroupfoundation.org](http://www.brynmelyngroupfoundation.org), as well as the websites of the individual organisations.*

## 11th & 12th November: "Positive Partnerships" conference

The All Wales Education Support Group and the Welsh Assembly Government are holding a conference on "Positive Partnerships – Better Life Chances for Looked After Children." To increase access, the event will take place at two venues – NEWI, Wrexham, North Wales (11th Nov.), and Memorial Hall, Barry, South Wales (12th Nov.). Key speakers will include Jane Davidson, Minister for Education and Lifelong Learning, and Peter Clarke, the Children's Commissioner for Wales.

*To book, contact Sian Thomas, Children First Team, Welsh Assembly Government, Cathays Park, Cardiff CF10 3NQ; email: [children.first@wales.gsi.gov.uk](mailto:children.first@wales.gsi.gov.uk); fax: 02920 823142.*

## 2nd–3rd December: Annual conference & AGM

"Are we making a difference?" is the theme of the Scottish Throughcare & Aftercare Forum's Annual Conference & AGM, to be held at Crieff Hydro Hotel, Perthshire. *Full details at: [www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk](http://www.scottishthroughcare.org.uk)*

## 3rd February 2005: NLCAS Annual Conference 2005

The conference will take place in central London, and will focus on the emotional wellbeing of young people leaving care. *Details in December issue of KeyNotes, but to ensure you receive a booking form, contact [amanda.gibson@raineronline.org](mailto:amanda.gibson@raineronline.org), tel: 020 8808 6127.*

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*Rainer is a provider of, and gateway to, a comprehensive range of tailored services for under-supported young people. We work to enable them to lead emotionally and physically secure and fulfilled lives.*

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