

National Care Leavers' Week 2009: A round up

National Care Leavers' Week 2009 took place between October 25 and October 31. This annual event is a chance to raise awareness about children in care and care leavers, and highlight some of the issues they face. Here are just a few of the celebrations that took place around the UK.

Getting healthy in Hounslow

Our theme for the week was 'health'. Our celebrations started on Saturday 24 October with a healthy living day which gave young people access to medical help such as tests for blood pressure and sexually transmitted infections, and complimentary therapies including acupuncture, facials and massage. We also offered fruit and vegetable testing, smoothie making, advice on stress management and a rowing challenge.

Over 30 care leavers attended the day. They 'speed dated' their way around the stalls, getting signatures from each stall holder to show they had completed the activity. As an incentive, participants could collect a prize after they had visited five, 10, 15 and 20 stalls. Those young people who had been to all 25 stalls were entered into a prize draw to win a Wii fit or an ipod.

The fun didn't stop there! Over the course of the week, we held daily activities including first aid training, ice-skating and a treetop adventure challenge. It was a thoroughly enjoyable and beneficial week for all those who took part.

For more information, email
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Influencing services in Surrey

During National Care Leavers Week 2009, Catch22 – Surrey 18plus service held a planning day to ask young people what they thought about a variety of issues, including: Hear by Right – our young people's participation group, work experience and apprenticeship opportunities in the new From Care2Work scheme, and the new Catch22 leaflets and presentations.



These have all been included in the next newsletter and we are planning an event next Easter with the aim to invite young people to meet the team. This will include a question and answer panel where the young people will be able to 'grill' the managers.

For more information, email
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Promote your events through our online events calendar

Events, conferences and meetings are an important way to learn about what others are doing, to share good practice and to hear about innovative ways of working. NCAS has an events calendar on our website www.leavingcare.org/professionals/events/. Get in touch if you would like to promote an event you are organising – ncas@catch-22.org.uk

Inaugural NCAS annual lecture

The first National Care Advisory Service (NCAS) annual lecture took place on 29 October 2009 during Care Leavers' Week. Chaired by national manager John Hill, the event included speakers from the UK and Europe and explored how corporate parenting is understood as a concept and how it should be implemented from central to local government.

The event had an international flavour with contributions from Jason Matthews regional coordinator, who shared his experience of parenting in Poland, a presentation on SOS Kinderdorf's work to improve young people's experience of leaving care across the European Union, and finally Professor Mike Stein who gave the keynote address.

Professor Stein applied his extensive knowledge of care and leaving care to the topic of corporate parenting, questioning the strange paradox of the name itself, and exploring how local authorities can ensure they are focused on the parenting part of the equation. He also gave an international perspective, sharing policy and practice messages from his international research group on leaving care.



(Clockwise from top left): Jason Matthews, John Hill, Lucy Sweetman and Professor Mike Stein addressing the annual lecture audience

Corporate parenting: A challenge

NCAS has been training and assisting local authorities in thinking about corporate parenting and how best to implement it at strategic, operational and personal levels for young people in and leaving care.

The Care Matters agenda has pushed corporate parenting up the care agenda and local authorities must think about what the concept means for children and young people in care.

Many authorities have invested in training for elected members, developed corporate parenting policies and strategies, and have formed strategic groups to ensure a solid corporate parenting message of shared responsibility at all levels is communicated. Where this is working well, authorities are also developing or strengthening mechanisms for children and young people to be involved in service development, delivery and policy discussion through the pledge and children in care councils.

All of these activities reflect the NCAS model of good corporate parenting that was established through What Makes the Difference. That model showed the strategic and operational necessity of structures, policy and young people's involvement. It also made the argument for empowering the relationship between children and young people and the person closest to them,

enabling that person to embody the parenting provided by the local authority.

Corporate parenting solutions

Now we are exploring the next step. Over the last two years we have seen the development of virtual head teachers, established to have an overview of the educational outcomes of children in care within local authorities. They have the power to ask questions and pursue solutions to problems that affect both individuals and the in-care cohort as a whole.

We propose this model is applied to a corporate parenting champion, a person with an overview of young people's outcomes as a whole, not just in relation to education. We think that the champion needs to sit at director level within children's services and without any other portfolio – ensuring they can do their job without the stress of delivering a service themselves.

To read more about our proposal go to www.leavingcare.org/professionals/policy_and_consultations/corporateparenting

What do you think? We're interested in your thoughts. Could a corporate parenting champion work? How would it work in your authority? Let us know: ncas@catch-22.org.uk

Art attack!

To celebrate this year's Care Leavers' Week, Voice organised a powerful art and photography exhibition, 'Home from Home', which showcased the work of young people from care backgrounds. At our private view in Westminster, guests included many of the young artists as well as representatives from government departments, charities, and agencies. Tim Loughton MP, shadow minister for children, spoke at the event and congratulated the young people on their fantastic achievements.



'Constant Flavour' by Sally Bartolo

'Home from Home' explored the way young people feel about care, and the aspirations they have for their future. Working closely with professional artists and photographers, the participants – none of whom have worked on this kind of project before – reflected their experiences using photography and digital art as a creative outlet.

Sally, one of the young artists who took part, said: "I felt proud to see my work on display. I really enjoyed the project, it's been inspirational as it allowed me to reflect on my life. I loved the opportunity to meet other young people who have had similar experiences."

For more information, email rosamund.hall@voiceyp.org



Tim Loughton MP with young people at the exhibition launch

Ed Balls MP, secretary of state for children, schools and families was delighted to offer his support during National Care Leavers' Week 2009.

"National Care Leavers Week is a well established annual event, offering a great opportunity to celebrate the achievements of care leavers and to thank all those who support them. Ensuring we do everything we can to help young people to make good transitions when they leave care is tremendously important; that's why I was proud to have helped launch the From Care2Work programme earlier this year ... I want to see more imaginative partnership approaches like this one, so every care leaver gets the help and opportunities they need."