



NATIONAL CARE LEAVERS' WEEK 2007

Monday 22 October to Saturday 27 October 2007

'The Difference'



**Opportunities and Challenges -
Making the White Paper Work
Leaving Care - What Are Your Rights?
Interview - 'What Makes the Difference?'**

'The difference' – how we, as managers, workers, carers and policy makers work together with older children in care and care leavers to improve outcomes.

Making a difference

It is five years since the first National Care Leavers' Day was held marked by events outside Parliament and in the Welsh Assembly.

Care leaver DJ and actor Goldie, fresh from an appearance on celebrity big brother, joined a handful of well-wishers to release 10,000 balloons over Westminster, each symbolically carrying a small packet of Poppy seeds and a message of hope from a care leaver.

It was a time of great promise in leaving care Services, with the Children (Leaving Care) Act 2000 in the early stages of implementation, giving new duties to 'keep in touch' til 21, promises of suitable accommodation for all and the introduction of Pathway Planning, with the expectation that every child would now have a suitable plan to take them out of care and into independence. So how far have we come in services for care leavers? Our poppy seeds will have met mixed fates, some having being planted and nurtured are now thriving and blooming. Others will have landed unattended on the proverbial stony ground. And so too with the 6,000 children who leave care every year to make their way in the world. Some succeed against all the odds, others struggle to get started in adult life. There are still far too many stories of children feeling that they are pushed out of care too soon and against their wishes, and inequalities across the country in terms of the level of support a care leaver receives. There are still far too many care leavers in seriously sub-standard accommodation.

Since 2002, National Care Leavers' Week has campaigned on housing, mental health, extended transitions and barriers to work. All issues addressed afresh in the White Paper 'Care Matters: Time for Change', with new promises of priority accommodation, improved access to education, training and employment and a real recognition of the emotional and psychological trauma that can accompany an early and accelerated transition from the care system to independent life. Most crucially, Government has fully understood the need to view transitions from care as a process that takes many years, rather than as a single event. There will be access to support up to the age of 25 for students, and the possibility of remaining in care for longer as of right in certain circumstances.

Many questions remain to be answered about the deliverability of these promises with councils feeling squeezed in the recent Spending Review, will there be sufficient resources to deliver? And when the needs of care leavers are set against other priorities for funding – elder care, education, health services, early intervention, safeguarding and parenting support, who will come out on top? In our leading article, a range of stakeholders reflect on the opportunities and challenges presented by the forthcoming legislation. We also look at a number of positive initiatives across the country working directly to improve the lives of care leavers in very specific ways and present a view from Mike Lindsay, reflecting the concerns that are still very much present when young people are asked directly about their experiences of leaving care. We also have reflections from Simon Nixon, moving on from his role as Young Person's Involvement Worker for A National Voice in the South East .

Whether you are able to attend a National Care Leavers' Week event yourself, have organised your own activity on a local or regional basis, or just use the week to reflect on your own practice and service, I hope you enjoy the first National Care Leavers' Week magazine.



Care Leavers author Paolo Hewitt, DJ Goldie and Student Dawn Howley launch 10,000 balloons outside the Houses of Parliament in 2002

Janet Rich
Bryn Melyn Group Foundation
National Care Leavers' Week coordinator

Events taking place in National Care Leavers' Week

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| <i>Monday 22nd</i> | <i>'Beyond True Stories' creative writing workshop in Salisbury for care leavers</i> |
| <i>Tuesday 23rd</i> | <i>'The Difference' conference and participation event in London for all leaving care professionals, researchers, and young people</i> |
| <i>Wednesday 24th</i> | <i>Launch of joint training with the Financial Services Agency for leaving care workers and carers</i> |
| <i>Thursday 25th</i> | <i>'The Difference' conference and participation event in Leeds</i> |
| <i>Friday 26th (details tbc)</i> | <i>Launch of Good Practice Guide to Keeping in Touch</i> |

Full details at:
www.epolitix.com/EN/forums/national+care+leavers+week

Care matters: Time for change

We asked six key stakeholders what are the opportunities and challenges in making the White Paper work.

Young people in care often have a difficult move to adulthood. The opportunity to delay the change until they are ready is not always open to them, leading to unwanted transitions that happen too fast. At present, there is an expectation that young people leaving the care system will have the skills necessary to cope on their own. However, young people without parental and family support are often exposed to greater risks than other adolescents.

Care Matters: Time for Change 2007

Kirsty Flint is a 17 year old Care Leaver. In response to ideas in the White Paper Kirsty thinks:



RE NATIONAL PLEDGE FOR CHILDREN IN CARE

"I think its good that Social Services make pledges (promises), as long as they keep to their word about what they promise to do."

RE RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING OF SOCIAL WORKERS

"In my opinion I think that most social workers are very well trained, but others are not that well trained"

PILOT STAYING IN CARE TIL 21 YRS

"I am fully on the side of when children are in care, they should leave care when they are 21, because, if it is younger than that, it is far too fast. They still need to be encouraged to travel independently and live independently before they leave care. I also think 18 is no older than 16 yrs old.....ok it is 2 yrs older, but I still think it is too young"

David Kidney MP. Chair of The Associate Parliamentary Group for Children in Care and Care Leavers

"I welcome the emphasis on supporting children in their families, including support for kinship care where appropriate; helping all children to aim high and encourage families (including foster carers and local authorities where they are corporate parents) to have high aspirations for all children in their care. The drive to make sure education and healthcare services are the best for all children, with a special effort to make sure looked after children do get the very best is essential as is the reduction in the number of changes (including moves of home) for looked after children if we are to achieve better outcomes for this group. I think that giving looked after children help to acquire the skills they will need to make the transition from care to independence long before the transition starts is vital. Supporting all looked after children after the age of 16 in their education, skills training, job seeking and getting decent accommodation is rightly given high priority in Care Matters and above all, looked after children and care leavers have a great store of knowledge and experience that should be applied in making all support services better for all future service users - so let's listen to them and involve them in planning, delivering, monitoring and evaluating services."

Susie Burden is Managing Director of The Leaving Care Company

"The white paper is fantastic because it puts the needs of young people right at the centre of services. In our experience however, young people don't really want to stay in fostering, they want independence.

We need to be sensitive about what that means for individual care leavers, make sure care leavers can actually have a say in what kind of service is right for them and ensure they all receive the level of support they need regardless of what accommodation choice they make.

One of the main aims of Care Matters is to provide supported accommodation for older young people – I believe our service is a living breathing testament to this aim, and that it works in reality. Young people want our support and they demonstrate this by engaging with the project so effectively.

Our first Annual Report shows this – 100% of young people were placed in a geographical area THEY chose. For Leaving Care placements, choice, adequate support and inclusion is key."

Andy Jones – Leaving Care Manager Westminster City Council



"There are certainly challenges inherent in extending fostering provision. For Westminster this means children opting to stay in foster placements staying out of borough for longer, as we have so few placements within Westminster itself, which could make it more difficult to deliver a high quality of service to them as care leavers. We welcome the proposals overall and see ourselves already leading in many areas. Our existing eight point promise to Care Leavers will be the basis of our Pledge and consultation and participation are very firmly embedded. Young people have regular access to senior managers and elected members which has really made a difference, so I would see the development of Children in Care Councils across the country as a very positive move. Big issues remain around accommodation. Westminster has a good housing scheme, but I would like to see young care leavers able to remain in transitional supported housing for much longer where necessary; there are big gaps too in housing services for people with mental health or learning difficulties who fall through the cracks in existing provision."

**Dr Jim Goddard
Secretary, Care Leavers Association**



"The White Paper lacks real ambition and vision. We seem to expect care leavers to be somehow superhuman; if they have not got their lives on track by 21 they have somehow failed. Unless Government makes a cultural shift and understands that we don't expect family reared 21 year olds to be fully independent and sorted we won't move far beyond the current inadequate provision. Rights to stay in foster care should not be pilots, they should be available across the board, with immediate effect and extended care should apply to all placements, foster or residential. The whole idea of leaving care still basically happening for most children at 18 is ill founded. The proposed changes are incremental and will bring improvements for some care leavers in some instances, but the chance for a radical rethink has been missed. We applaud universal grants for university, and the wider work in universities themselves to encourage increased admissions from care and are also very positive about the introduction of Children in Care Councils. These councils must really have teeth and truly represent the full range of disadvantaged voices they speak for."

Ann Baxter is DCS for Stockton Borough Council and Chair of the Health, Care & Additional Needs Policy Committee for ADCS

"ADCS is very positive about the White Paper which really highlights the importance that Government is now giving to young people, and within that is particularly accepting of the additional measures necessary to provide the extra support needed for young people who have been through the care system. We fully support Government's vision for children's services and hope to see some significant extra resources to support that vision. Of course when it comes to resources we could always do with more, but there is a very important point here in terms of some of the pilot proposals and ensuring that they are fully funded and resourced when they move beyond pilots. ADCS has been calling for the needs of children and young people in care to be treated as a high priority for a long time and we look forward to working with Government and advising on the detail of the Bill as it goes through Parliament and to supporting all of our members to deliver the new legislation. The focus on extended transitions is particularly welcome, I personally know how important this can be; in my own borough we have an open door policy and drop-ins on Christmas day for all our ex-care leavers of all ages."

What Makes the Difference?

The two main conference events for this year's National Care Leavers' Week have been organised by the What Makes the Difference (WMTD) project.



Now in its second year, WMTD is a European funded project helping to improve outcomes for young people in and leaving care. The project has worked with over 90 local authorities and almost 1,000 young people across England, focussing on four main themes: preparation and planning; education and training; work experience and employment and empowerment and service user involvement.

As well as drawing together examples of good practice and creating tools to help disseminate successful activities, a main aim of the project is to challenge and influence local practice and national policy. WMTD has worked closely with both local authorities and central Government, contributing to the development of the Care Matters proposals which will become legislation this autumn.

John Hill, National Project manager for WMTD is positive about what can be achieved through new legislation:

"Time will tell whether Care Matters will make a difference. Personally I think it was time for a major re-think about 'care' and what care means to young people on the ground. I think in general that we have forgotten to focus national policy development and local services on the needs of young people. Care Matters can re-focus our attention to achieve that for the next few years. I believe that young people haven't really ever been considered as real partners in developing local services and as such I really like the concept of Children in Care Councils and particularly the Pledge. If local authorities really value these proposals and implement them properly they can make a big difference to local services – which is what young people were asking for.

At a local level more resources for education support, extended placements post 18, more supported accommodation and better regulation before leaving care are all valuable gains. I also think that virtual head teachers could be a good thing. Children in Care services need an advocate who understands the education world to help them get better services for young people in and from care."

Hill believes that it was high time that Government took their responsibilities as Corporate Parents seriously and welcomes the new designation of Children in Care by Alan Johnson as 'the highest priority'.

The WMTD project, due to end in the Spring of 2008, has not all been about policy and influencing however. One of its main aims was to produce, or work jointly with other partners in creating, a range of practical resources which can make a direct and immediate difference on the quality of services provided to care leavers and children preparing to leave care.

Among the new resources due for launch during National Care Leavers' Week there is an accredited Preparation for Independence training pack for professionals and an integrated independence pack for young people, 'What Works' in education support, training, work experience and employment, a World of Work CD Rom in partnership with The Who Cares? Trust, and National Standards for Leaving Care with a tool-kit full of good practice examples from across the country.

The largest piece of peer research so far by young people from care 'What made the difference for you?' will also be released with a guide to developing a model of Peer Support and Service User Involvement as well as a new information website www.leavingcare.org

Another publication from the WMTD project is the Guide to Corporate Parenting that encompasses research and learning from throughout the project and includes a film made by young people. We asked John Hill if he thought the work of WMTD would have a real impact on the 'postcode lottery' of leaving care services experienced by young people:

"On our own WMTD can't make corporate parents care properly for their young people when they haven't done so before. We have worked in many authorities over the past 2 years and I have found everywhere I go that as individuals the people involved do want to improve services. So why do they struggle? For the most part where they are struggling they just don't know how to succeed. I hope that by WMTD showing them 'the best' they will see how they can improve their own services.

Change is also needed at a national level and the Children in Care Bill will push that agenda forward. Most importantly our work on empowering young people will, I hope, strengthen their ability to advocate for themselves. I think it is that which will make the biggest difference. We do need national policy change – but I've realised after nearly 30 years working with young people in and from care that it is them who can really make a difference to their lives if we empower them to do so."

"Time will tell whether Care Matters will make a difference. Personally I think it was time for a major re-think about 'care' and what care means to young people on the ground."

John Hill,
National Project Manager

All the way to the top

Extending Aspiration for Care Leavers



The Frank Buttle Trust

The Frank Buttle Trust launched its quality mark for universities in June 2006 and already it has 22 accredited universities with a further 15 applicants being processed. The Trust has long been interested in promoting the educational needs of vulnerable groups, but when their research report *By Degrees*, tracking 129 care leavers on their journey from care through

university was completed, even those within the Trust were shocked at the results. "There were so few children from care making it to university, and for those that did get there it was such a struggle for them to complete their courses, we determined that we were going to make this research have a real impact" says Frank Buttle's Chief Executive Gerri McAndrew.

By developing a Quality Mark which tracks how well universities support students from care – at every stage from admission through to graduation – the project aims to increase numbers from care attending university and improve the quality of their experience whilst they are there.

McAndrew says "We have been immensely impressed by the amount of enthusiasm and interest we have received from the Higher Education sector for this scheme. There has certainly been a strong willingness to help, and one of the biggest barriers to students from care receiving the additional support they might need is that they are simply invisible."

Many students are reluctant to speak about their experiences, wanting to 'fit in' with other students and will often only seek additional support through student welfare services once they are really struggling. The Quality Mark aims to educate support staff and other students to be care aware and remove the perceived stigma of being a care leaver. An optional tick box has recently been introduced onto the UCAS form enabling students to declare their care status at the time of application.

Ceri Nursaw is Head of Access and Community Engagement at Leeds University, one of the pilot partners that worked with The Frank Buttle Trust on developing the Quality Mark. "It has really made us look at our own internal structures", says Nursaw. "All our services from student welfare, finance, accommodation, counselling and admissions have had to work together. We simply didn't know there was this hidden group of people called care leavers. Once we realised the specific problems they experienced – such as needing 365 day accommodation – we could begin to respond and provide better support, enabling them to concentrate on their studies and enjoy student life."

The scheme does not just improve the quality of understanding and support that students from care receive whilst they are at university. Participating institutions are expected to be pro-active in reaching out to children from care and encouraging them to think about university as a realistic option.

The Leeds outreach project worked with 80 young people to raise aspiration – "when we started only 10% wanted to go on to further or higher education, now 100% say they do." Says Nursaw. Evaluation also shows that their school grades have improved as a direct result of the intervention – which includes students and staff from the university engaging with the groups on a weekly basis, either in direct curriculum



Gerri McAndrew, Chief Executive, The Frank Buttle Trust

support, or activities designed to boost confidence, and the volunteer students also benefit enormously from their involvement. Like the adults working at the university, they are largely middle class youngsters from a relatively sheltered background, and simply didn't know about care.

Gerri McAndrew is convinced the Quality Mark has already made a big difference to the lives of many students, although she acknowledges it will take between 2 - 3 years before any real impact on student admissions can be properly assessed.

"This is an example of a piece of research that has directly influenced both practice and legislation. We are delighted with the additional support pledged to students from care in the White Paper, and with the enthusiasm we have seen for the Quality Mark from all sectors."

"Of course not every student wants to disclose that they have been in care, even to the university welfare services, but we really hope to promote a culture where the wider university population is better educated about what care means, and being from care really won't be such a big deal in the future."

In the meantime, McAndrew has her hands full keeping up with the demand to speak to interested universities. Following its inception in England the Quality Mark was extended to Wales in November 2006 and has recently been launched in Scotland. Further Education Institutions have also approached the Trust wanting to develop a similar scheme.

Thanks to the Frank Buttle Trust, it looks like life as a care leaver at university really will begin to improve by degrees.

Further information is available at
www.buttletrust.org/quality_mark/

Reflections on care

I consider myself very fortunate having had a very good upbringing in a loving home with all the support and freedom that I needed growing up. An upbringing that over the last two years I have become ever more grateful for as I worked to improve a system that is supposed to provide the same care for young people it looks after.

I consider myself privileged to have spent the last two years working for one of the most forward thinking and outstanding organisations in its field. A National Voice is an organisation run for and by care experienced young people to create positive changes in the care system.

I have experienced the amazing energy and commitment of a fantastic team, and been truly impressed by the volume and quality of reports and campaigns generated from two tiny offices. I think I have been most blown away by the work of the LILAC Team. Leading Improvements for Looked After Children and is a kite mark for quality developed and delivered by care-experienced young people. Its key purpose is to draw upon the experiences and expertise of care-experienced young people to improve the policy and practice of local authorities in consulting and involving looked-after children and care leavers.

I have no doubt that it will be a raving success and provide many more young people with the opportunity to make real difference to the services that are provided for them. 3 recent LILAC training events proved there is real interest in this kite mark and that social care professionals really appreciate training and consultancy from 'experts by experience'.

I am proud that the work of ANV has had a direct affect on the Government's Care Matters proposals, acknowledging at last its failure to provide proper and adequate support for the young people in its care and taking steps to amend this. Care Matters is a good move but it's only a start. Government needs to build momentum, listen more to what young people are asking for and provide more opportunities for them to be heard and to become trainers.

Working for and with A National Voice for the last two yeas has made me realise that despite all the bad press and dismal news surrounding the care system, there are a lot of positives pushing the way forward and often in the form of the young people themselves. Young people, in spite of hardship and difficulties care enough not only for themselves but for over 60,000 other young people who share similar backgrounds and face similar challenges. Their capacity for altruism towards their peers is amazing.

Simon Nixon

Simon Nixon leaves A National Voice after two happy years as Youth Involvement Worker for the South East.

The Leaving Care Company is dedicated to providing accommodation and support for care leavers in the community throughout the North of England.



YOUNG PEOPLES GUIDE



The Leaving Care Company is dedicated to providing accommodation and support for care leavers in the community. We provide this support throughout the North of England.

- We have an experienced and dedicated team
- Consistent support from a Outreach worker dedicated to each young person
- Committed to excellence and good outcomes for all our young people

We currently work with young people aged between 16 and 21 years who may have emotional, behavioural, psycho-social or learning difficulties.

The Leaving Care Company also provides parent and baby placements.

Feel free to visit our Website
www.theleavingcarecompany.co.uk

For referrals or more information please call 0161 6330003 or email: info@theleavingcarecompany.co.uk

Young people's views on leaving care

This article gives a brief outline of what the Children's Rights Director said in his report, last year, on young people's views about leaving care.

- In total, we consulted the views of **208** young people, throughout July and August 2005.
- **117** young people took part in sixteen consultation workshops (including one workshop for 7 young mothers who had left care).
- We visited **2** young people in a home for children with disability.
- Also, met with two separate groups of 7 young people in a local authority secure unit (i.e. **14** in all).
- Another **75** young people returned survey questionnaires (45 preparing to leave care, 30 had already left).



Dr Mike Lindsay

KEY FINDINGS

- 1) There was little middle ground in the quality of support and preparation that young people leaving care receive. In most cases, it was either excellent or poor and, in some cases, non-existent.
- 2) A number of young people felt that they had been forced to leave care too early. They wanted to be given more say in both how and when they left.
- 3) Young people perceived that their leaving care worker often had no more power than they did.
- 4) Highest praise was reserved for those workers who young people saw as going that extra distance to make good things happen for them.
- 5) In applying for work, many young people had a clear sense that they could be discriminated against for being from care. We developed a standard test for anti-discriminatory practice:

If a decision or action cannot be justified for any young person, or group of young people, then it is probably an example of "careism" to insist that it is acceptable for children looked after.

- 6) In terms of personal safety and welfare, the irony was not lost on some young people that they were placed in locations, and with people, where it was previously considered not "in their best interests".
- 7) A consistent theme throughout this report was of many young people not knowing what their entitlement to leaving care and aftercare support is. In response to this we, together with a number of organisations, produced a guide called: "Your Starter for Ten", which sets out ten key entitlement for care leavers.

KEY QUOTES

"When social services put something in your plan they should follow it through"

"The ideal way to leave care would be when they wanted to leave"

"The amount given (i.e. leaving care grant) should be the same wherever you live"

"Social services should provide you with what you need as your parents normally would. They take you away, they should look after you"

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Young people told us that they need to leave care:

- With everything in place
- More gradually
- When they are ready
- Whilst being able to go back
- With enough time to prepare
- With easier methods of dealing with housing benefits
- With recognition that they needed more money
- Helped in getting travel cards and driving lessons
- Being able to contact key people
- Benefiting from money that councils have put aside for them
- With help in bringing up any children of their own
- Secure in knowing that where they live is safe
- With social workers understanding how difficult it is for them
- With accommodation guaranteed

The list of things that young people would like to see change reflects very closely many of the same aspirations, hopes and ambitions that 'good parents' up and down the country have, and deliver, for their own children.

KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATOR

And, finally, if implemented effectively it could be argued that there ever only needs to be one key performance indicator for leaving care:

"If you cannot ensure that I will leave your care in better conditions and circumstances than I arrived, then don't bother"

Dr Mike Lindsay,
Head of Advice at the Office of the Children's Rights Director

SuperSonic... You've got to be yourself

On Wednesday 11th July A National Voice (ANV) launched the SuperSonic Campaign – designed to promote positive role models and raise aspirations for all children in care.



ANV has interviewed many care experienced adults about their time in care, their opinions about the care system and how they feel they have made a success of their lives and is encouraging as many ex-care leavers as possible to come forward with their stories of personal achievement.

As well as notable celebrities, professionals and high earners, ANV also wants to showcase the achievements of those who have happy families of their own, those who are happy with their jobs, those who are happy with their relationships and those who are just happy with themselves... All contributions will be featured on the SuperSonic Website due to be launched during National Care Leavers' Week.

National Coordinator Maxine Wrigley said "there should be no stigma attached to having experience of Care. SuperSonic aims to challenge stereotypes and make it clear that young people from care are capable of achieving anything; We can all go SuperSonic!"

More details are available at:

www.anationalvoice.org/news/newslet2.htm

" I offer my whole hearted support to the SuperSonic campaign. I personally know just how important it is to encourage and empower youngsters in the care system to be ambitious and break barriers. The SuperSonic Website will allow them to read and share in the personal success stories from a variety of individuals from care who all followed their dreams and have gone on to achieve great things "

**Samantha Morton, Oscar/Bafta nominated actress
(Ex Care Leaver):**

" We all need positive role models - I am excited by the superSonic campaign run by kids from care on behalf of the young person - led organisation A National Voice "

**Kriss Akabusi MBE, Olympic Medallist
(Ex Care Leaver):**

A Driving Ambition

Learning to drive is something most of us absolutely take for granted when we have been brought up in a family.

As a care leaver, often expected to survive independently from the age of 16 and with no family to fall back on, getting the money together for driving lessons and a test is a tough call. Yet a driving licence is a passport to so many more job opportunities.

Bryn Melyn Group Foundation is therefore delighted to announce the launch of a charity bursary to assist care leavers in the North West with the cost of driving lessons. 'The Jim Atkinson Open Road Bursary' kindly donated by 1st Call Driving School in Skelmersdale is made in tribute to proprietor Paul Atkinson's father. Paul has himself worked with young people and understands the disadvantages many of them face. Of his father he says "My Dad (who sadly passed away last year) was a teacher in a secondary school. He loved helping people and gave many hours of his spare time helping and educating young people. I know he would have supported this scheme"

Initially just one bursary will be available through the Bryn Melyn Group Foundation's normal grants application process, however Foundation

Trustee Janet Rich said "we get so many applications for driving lessons that we cannot fully fund them all and we very much hope Paul's generosity will inspire other driving schools to work with us on similar schemes across the country."

The bursary also provides for the driver on passing their test to take advanced skills training, ensuring their safety as a young driver on today's difficult roads.

Paul Atkinson becomes our second businessman in the North West to make a personal difference to care leavers following the announcement of Care Leaver training bursaries by Bollington Insurance during last year's National Care Leavers' Week. Paul is well aware of the difficulties faced by children brought up in care "if I can do something positive to help just one youngster into a decent job it will be worth while. My life has taken many twists and turns but one constant has been my family, without which I would be nothing. I can't begin to imagine what it must be like starting out as a young adult in life with no family."