

EVERY CHILD LEAVING CARE MATTERS

Campaign Newsletter - A letter from the Chair

July 2015

Where Have We Been?

This newsletter should start with an apology to all members for the lack of any newsletters from the ECLCM campaign over recent months. As the Chair of the campaign, I feel we owe our members this apology and I am happy to make it and offer a commitment to do better in future.

Having said that, we have been very active over those months. I will use this letter to detail some of our work in the last few months and signpost how we see things going over the next few. Rest assured - we have not gone away, but are very much still here, and we intend to be here until the ECLCM campaign delivers the option for residential care leavers to 'stay put' until they are at least 21 – no matter where they happen to be placed. Children's needs must be determined through individual assessment and plans must address those individual assessments. Basic good practice which Staying Put as it is implemented does not allow. ECLCM will campaign until it does.



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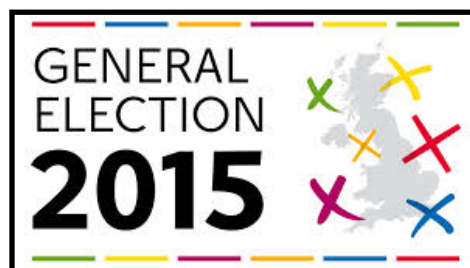
PLEASE SIGN THE PETITION

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ECLCM is a campaign group, without funding or political affiliations with any other group, formed to stop Government discrimination against children in residential care who want support to 21, the same as those in foster care.

The General Election



The outcome of the General Election was obviously a big disappointment from the perspective of the sole aim of the ECLCM campaign. ECLCM is not affiliated to any political group, but in the days and weeks leading up to the General Election we were working extremely hard to lobby politicians of all parties, local and national, on policy regarding 'Staying Put'. We also aligned ourselves very closely with like-minded people in other campaigns and produced some blogs for our friends at Children England who actively sought to highlight the needs of all care leavers and children in care as the election approached.

In spite of our efforts and numerous approaches to the political parties nationally, and although all the other major parties offered some commitment to address 'Staying Put' for all care leavers if they were in government, the Conservative Party didn't even respond to any of our communications.

We were also disappointed, as we imagine Kathy Evans from Children England must have been, that despite a terrific united effort, the national media failed to accept that children in care were worthy of public debate, or even being the subject of questions to candidates in the public debates. The plight and urgent needs of all care leavers remained invisible - no change there then!

Although we have much to do gaining party political support on a national level we have forged some tremendous links within local authorities, both with local councillors and politicians, but with Directors of Children's Services and 'Children's Champions'. For example, we have been delighted to build solid links with the Constituency Labour Party and local councillors in the Warrington area. We have been happy to meet with them and make presentations at their meetings, and they have openly and wholeheartedly supported the ECLCM campaign.

In terms of national politicians, we have decided that until Labour and the Liberal Democrats have resolved their leadership elections, there is little hope and therefore little point in our seeking to engage meaningfully.



For the Future

We are in the process of having a new website created for us by good friends of the ECLCM campaign. I don't have their permission to identify them in this newsletter but 'twitter' followers can easily find out who I mean. They have agreed to set up a web page for us free of charge, which vital for us because we decline any funding from external sources in order to ensure our independence. We hope that the web site will be operational within the next couple of months and then hopefully communications will improve significantly.

We propose to define and revise our "Core Group" into a 'Board'. Having been involved in the campaign for more than eighteen months now we appreciate that we are engaged in a marathon rather than a sprint and we will need to prepare for a long campaign. To be as well prepared as we can be for this campaign, we recognise the need for more structure in our organisation, to include clear responsibilities being allocated to Board members, and clearer roles being identified.

Our Board

At present the Board comprises (alphabetically):

- Ben Ashcroft
- Ian Dickson
- Kevin Edwards
- Rob Gillespie
- Danielle McLaughlin
- Ed Nixon (Chair)

We have a couple of new members, Kev and Rob, who are welcome additions to the team. We are also happy to accept the support of Jane Billows who has offered to be our 'Administrator'. This is a role that desperately needs filling in order to bring a more efficient and effective organisation to our work.

Laming Inquiry

We are currently in the early stages of preparing a submission to the Laming Inquiry. We anticipate that we should be able to meet the deadline of August 4th. We have an extensive 'library' of our earlier work in the form of previous submissions/papers/blogs which we will draw upon for the submission, given our message hasn't altered radically. We remain a campaign with a single objective – Staying Put rights for all care leavers until the age of 21, appropriately funded by central government. Any inquiry into why care leavers are disproportionately represented in crime statistics and custody will have to consider the multiple contributory factors that we have detailed many times in our presentations and published work.

From where we as a campaign for justice for all care leavers stand, looking back over decades of poor provision for care leavers resulting in many suffering greatly, it seems to us that it has been ever thus. The most surprising thing is that given the experiences of many children in care and care leavers of all ages, anyone is surprised!

Ian and I have been attending meetings of the 'Children in care and care-leavers in the criminal justice system' working group, comprised of leading academics in the criminal justice system, our good friends from the Care leavers' Association and professionals working across the criminal justice system for young adults. We have been made extremely welcome and gladly accepted the opportunity to widen our network of professionals working for children and young people. The only issue is that these workers tend to be based in the north west of England (See below – expansion of membership)



Conference at St James Park, Newcastle

We are very pleased to have been invited to open a conference on 24th September this year. It is being held in St James Park (The Newcastle United football ground in Newcastle) and is 'hosted' by 'The Care Leavers Association, The National Centre for Therapeutic Residential and Foster Care, The Care Forum in Wales and Celcis. The conference is titled 'Pushing the Limits of Permanence' and will consider both residential child care and foster care. We are particularly grateful to the CLA who were responsible for our invitation. This will be our first presentation on behalf of ECLCM at a national conference.



We still hope to support Hope University in Liverpool with a conference they are hoping to hold this year. We await news from Hope about the progress of this planned conference, but if it goes ahead in Liverpool as anticipated, it will offer ECLCM a fairly prominent profile which should enable us to generate a wider interest in our campaign amongst politicians and professionals within the public, independent and charity sectors.



Expansion of Membership

We hope to expand our membership to enable us to offer an ever increasing platform for the ECLCM campaign to remain at the forefront of seeking equality and justice for residential care leavers in gaining equal 'Staying Put' rights. We are conscious that purely by chance we are more active in the north of England, particularly Greater Manchester and Merseyside. We hope to explore the potential for establishing 'cluster groups' all around the country to represent an increasing membership which is genuinely nationwide. Ben and Kev are currently considering how they may be able to set up such groups in the West Yorkshire and North Wales area where they are based. Please contact us if you wish to set up an ECLCM group where you may live.

These are our main aims for the immediate future, and of course we will continue to maintain a presence on social media such as 'Twitter' and 'Facebook' to keep the campaign in the public eye.



If you have any questions or observations, please feel free to contact any of us to share your view.

Ed Nixon

ECLCM Chairman

