

A blog on our Halifax to London walk for Every Child Leaving Care Matters.

On the 24th September WE set off on our #Halifax2London walk on behalf of ResCareTo21 and the Children and young people we work for.

The campaign started because the voices of the young people were listened to and heard loud and clearly by some, if not all. This is what all the team are conscious of and it is at the forefront of our minds, hearts and work.

On the first few days of walking it became apparent and clear to our team that something was happening. I couldn't put my finger on it until after the presentations at Manchester Metropolitan University and Hope University and walked and talked with good people like Donna Peach (Dr). What, in fact, was happening was that we were all uniting and agreeing to move forward together as one, somehow the walk provided a focus. We didn't need them to campaign we needed everyone to get behind us and move forward together, united as one, to make the greatest impact we can. When I first thought about the idea of walking from my home town of Halifax to London I had hoped to raise awareness of what ECLCM is all about. I couldn't have imagined just how successful it would be.

I was enjoying the experience and having the chance to meet people and spend time with them talking. We all agree one thing and that is children and young people leaving residential care placements should have the option to stay put until 21 like their brothers and sisters in foster care.

It was good on a personal level, I got to listen to other people's thoughts, opinions and experiences. I got to learn a lot too and understand more things clearer and I hope enlighten and educate others about precisely what we are trying to achieve, not something outrageous but the natural injustice of treating the two major groups of care leavers differently.

Half way through the walk I met Laura Smith MP in Nantwich. She made the time and effort to come and meet me. Laura 'got it' straight away. I was and still am very impressed with her. She is a star and will, in my opinion, rise quickly within the Labour Party. There is no doubt that someone with her beliefs and passion for 'doing the right thing' should do. She went one step further or maybe a few. She wore our t-shirt, badges and had a photo to show her support. Then drove off to her next appointment still wearing it.

She gave me real hope for the future of the campaign and politics in general. I'm sure she will inspire many new people to vote. A real person with real life experiences with a heart and common sense.

Over the next week I met Jon Dudley, Angie Naylor and my good friend Sharon. It was an honour to walk and learn so much from these people but most of all have them supporting our campaign. Jon even spent his Birthday walking with me - what a guy!

This reassured me how all the charities, organisations and good people were coming together. All moving forward as one. It was a truly amazing feeling what was happening for our children and young people.

We were increasing support by the hour, people were speaking up and loudly that ResCareTo21 should happen.

By the time I reached Northampton, I was getting tired and fighting off a cold. BUT as if someone knew I needed a lift it happened in the most amazing and unexpected way. I was inspired and blown away by an 11-year-old little lady who I can describe as thoughtful, caring, switched on and amazing. We had a good conversation. In fact it wasn't good, it was much better; more intelligent, with respect, than conversations I've had with previous colleagues. She's a special person as is her mom and her family who invited me for Tea. Wonderful experience, ha! Thanks for my card! Made me cry but don't tell anyone.

In St Albans, I had to film with the BBC Breakfast. Still fighting off a cold and cautious of the media. I can assure you Jayne made me think a little differently. Plus, she had a good sense of humour which was welcome. Good lady. Scott Casson-Rennie and Angie Naylor filmed and kept with the day as it was getting cold and late plus we had a presentation to get to in Stevenage. Angie is a star and always kept me entertained and sang for me. She is one of life's best. And Yorkshire!

After filming with the BBC me and Scott headed off to meet the wonderful Clare from Adoption UK who put so much time in to sorting the event out. She went more than the extra mile she went a Marathon. I appreciate that and all who came to the presentation. It was a great evening with like-minded and special people. There was a foster parent there who came after having a tough couple of nights. Thank you. You are a special person! And Marion! Amazing lady who I had the pleasure of meeting and Luke who always impresses me how much time he gives to help things improve. Top man.

Now to the last day of the walk apart from a couple of miles. I was joined by Tanya, Harvey (NAFP) and Guy who is the Chair of BASW. Tanya brought freshly baked Flapjacks which were still warm. Delicious and greatly appreciated by all of us.

I was very tired and trying not to show it but also thankful it was the last long day of over 20 miles. It was a great day with great conversations. We also had a laugh along the way. Then Guy started jogging... me and Harvey were walking a little quick. Longest walk Guy had ever had. What a brilliant man he is. He didn't give up! Nor will the ECLCM campaign. We enjoyed a couple of pints before we all parted. Always great to see Harvey as he is a friend and beautiful person.

The walk to Parliament was great, I knew it was over soon, my achilles' were twitching and felt like they were going to snap at any second. They didn't luckily. It was great to see our team waiting and to be joined by many other good people. Cassie, June, Frances and Carrie to name a few.

It was a good turn out and support from Charities, Orgs, MP's and Anne Longfield, the Childrens Commissioner, Children England in the person of 'our very own' Kathy who was the first and for a long time the only head of a large organisation to fully support us publicly; in fact many good people uniting as one. Too many to mention I'm afraid but thank you all and others who I met along the way.

@ResCareTo21 has always been a team effort and without all of their support it wouldn't have been possible. Thanks to Ed for letting me stay 3 night with him and his amazing wife. Thanks also to Ian for letting me stay a night with him and his wife. And Clare!!! She's just amazing.

And finally, thanks to everyone who helped, supported, contributed and made it the success it was. ECLCM is still some way from achieving its goal but, like my walk, it is a series of steps bringing us ever closer to equality of options for all care leavers.

It was good to get home and see my son and sister and spend some time with them.

Thank you!

#ECLCM