



EVERY CHILD



LEAVING CARE MATTERS

Campaign Newsletter – A letter from the Chair

December 2018

EVERY CHILD LEAVING
CARE MATTERS

PLEASE SIGN
THE PETITION

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OUR BOARD



Plus ça change, plus c'est la même chose. Once again it has been an interesting and somewhat fluid period for the Board of ECLCM. In part this accounts for a relative lack of information streaming for which we apologise to all of our supporters.

It's best that I just try to explain changes that have occurred and what might be described as personnel issues. Antony (Corrigan) has left the Board as he felt that he simply didn't have the time to devote to the campaign given other commitments. This is absolutely understandable and we wish him well with his studies as we do for all of his other endeavours and thank him for the contribution he made in his time with us. As with others who have left previously, he remains a supporter of our bid to have the option to 'Stay Put' made available to all care leavers. Delyth (Edwards) continues on her sabbatical although we hope that she may be able to re-join us in the early part of 2019. Ben (Ashcroft) as many of you may know has been unwell for many months and unable to take up an active role with the Board. I am delighted to say that he is now feeling much better and we hope that he, too, will be back with us very soon. As those of you who follow Twitter will know he has begun tweeting again and it's good to see him fighting in our corner again.

Whilst no longer Board Members our two ECLCM ambassadors, Nikki (Leddingham) and Ian (Gould) have been prolific on Twitter and I must give a very special mention to Nikki who has taken responsibility (again) for the @rescareto21 Twitter account. She has been amazing and almost single-handedly responsible for growing the numbers of folk who have signed our petition. The petition, whilst not our prime 'weapon' in the campaign is a constant reminder of what we are trying to do and every

single signature helps us in growing a 'constituency' which gives us power in our discussions with politicians – who must ultimately make the decision. On this note if you do have a friend, family member or even one of Santa's little helpers who hasn't signed please encourage them to do so. The remaining Board Members, Jane (Billows), Denise (Hutton), Doug Johnson, Rob (Gillespie) and I continue to try to do our best but it's been a bit of a challenge recently. We met this week but the previous two meetings – for various reasons were aborted – hence, in part, the lack of information coming from us.

If anyone has time on their hands, a passion for equality for children in and leaving care and a willingness to help we'd be pleased to hear from you.

POLITICIANS

I mentioned that we had not had a Board meeting in September. The reason we cancelled it was because the Labour Party were holding their Annual Conference in Liverpool the same week and we decided that it would be good to have the chance to meet with some of our supporters and importantly some who haven't yet declared support for @rescareto21 despite it being part of their last Party Manifesto going into the last General Election.

As such we rented a room in a beautiful location very close to the Conference Centre (The Bluecoat Chambers in central Liverpool kindly offered us a room at a reduced cost. We then sent personal and social media invitations to dozens of MP's. Two were kind enough to reply explaining that they would not be at the conference and as such would have to decline our invitation. We bought some refreshments and set ourselves up and waited for the MP's to arrive, and waited and waited and waited.

No-one showed! Odd isn't it that one expects more of people sometimes. Not coming was, in a sense OK if there had been some matter of great importance being debated and apologies had been offered. But we got simply nothing. I took the refreshments I'd bought and shared them among some homeless people who I know use various locations in the city to try to get some sleep, they were grateful and certainly worthier of the small food and drink items than those they had been bought for. It was a thoroughly depressing experience. Not the first in this campaign and I fear not the last. But we go on.

Ian Gould, who I previously mentioned continues to write to MP's of all parties inviting them to support our campaign and whilst responses are very slow in coming Ian's efforts are symbolic of our whole campaign showing patience and quiet (well not always quiet perhaps) determination to rectify the abhorrent discrimination against residential care leavers.

On a far more positive note we have been fully engaged with the Mayor of Greater Manchester, Andy Burnham in his fight to address homelessness in Manchester. Andy has proven to be very welcoming and recognises that a large proportion of those who end up homeless are care leavers. Through 'Round Table' discussions he has fully involved ECLCM with agencies, the commercial sector and other voluntary groups who are together not only fighting homelessness but also some of the predisposing causes of homelessness for children in care across the whole of Greater Manchester. We are extremely grateful to Andy for this opportunity and would very much welcome any similar invitations to engage from other Mayor's around the country.

You can most certainly help us in our campaign to engage with more politicians. Please ask your local councillors and MP's where they stand on the issue of Staying Put for children in residential care. If they are supportive then ask, cajole or in any other legal way have them say so publicly. If they aren't then ask them why and feel free to invite them to contact us for further information.

I make no apology for including below a draft letter for anyone interested in contacting their MP. I know its been included previously but nothing has changed – certainly not the offer to children leaving, being thrown out of or walking away from their children's home as their 18th birthday approaches.

Dear

Ref; Every Child Leaving Care Matters Campaign

I am writing to you as my constituency MP to assure myself that you are supporting a campaign that is important to me. The ECLCM campaign has been going for 4½ years now since the very welcome announcement was made that 'Staying Put' was to be introduced for all children in foster care. Unfortunately, or perhaps disgracefully, dependent on how passionate one is about such issues, children in residential care were excluded from this option. As an MP you won't need me to explain to you that, for a range of reasons (none of which are the child's fault), children in residential care tend to have more complex needs than children who successfully settle into a foster family.

The ECLCM campaign operates with no political affiliation, without funds and exclusively on the basis of having a very small group of volunteers. Despite this they have made considerable strides and established a reputation that has led to their inclusion in an advisory role in the Staying Close pilots – again you will be aware of these.

They, and as your constituent, I am asking for your public declaration of support for the extension of the option to remain in care until the age of twenty-one to all children in care. This can be done via Twitter or even, if you don't "do" Twitter by writing back to me and giving me permission to copy your letter of support to the campaign group.

Finally, thanks for taking a few minutes to read this – if you choose to respond positively to my request then be assured that those few minutes will have contributed to saving the lives of future Care Leavers many of whom commit suicide, enter prison, are detained in mental hotels or become homeless.

Sincerely

The following MP's have now (at the time of writing, December 2018) openly declared their support for the campaign to allow all children over the age of eighteen the option to remain in their placement until they are (up to) twenty-one – as can those children placed in foster care. They are as follows:

- | | | | |
|------------------------|----------------------|-------------------------|----------------------|
| 1. Debbie Abrahams | 2. Bill Esterson | 3. Emma Lewell-Buck | 4. Steve Reed |
| 5. Lucy Allan | 6. Tim Farron | 7. Clive Lewis | 8. Jonathan Reynolds |
| 9. Mike Amesbury | 10. Yvonne Fovargue | 11. Ivan Lewis | 12. Paul Scully |
| 13. David Amess | 14. Vicky Foxcroft | 15. Holly Lynch | 16. Naz Shah |
| 17. Tonia Antoniazzi | 18. Marcus Fysh | 19. Khalid Mahmood | 20. Jim Shannon |
| 21. Ian Austin | 22. Preet Kaur Gill | 23. Gordon Marsden | 24. Cat Smith |
| 25. Hilary Benn | 26. Kate Green | 27. Rachael Maskell | 28. Jeff Smith |
| 29. Bob Blackman | 30. Lilian Greenwood | 31. Kerry McCarthy | 32. Laura Smith |
| 33. Tom Brake | 34. Andrew Gwynne | 35. Andy McDonald | 36. Jo Stevens |
| 37. Richard Burgon | 38. Louise Haigh | 39. Liz McInnes | 40. Jo Swinson |
| 41. Vince Cable | 42. Emma Hardy | 43. Catherine McKinnell | 44. Tom Tugendhat |
| 45. Sarah Champion | 46. Sharon Hodgson | 47. Ian Mearns | 48. Karl Turner |
| 49. Jenny Chapman | 50. George Howarth | 51. Johnny Mercer | 52. Stephen Twigg |
| 53. Alex Cunningham | 54. Rupa Huq | 55. Kate Osamor | 56. Liz Twist |
| 57. Thangam Debbonaire | 58. Margot James | 59. Albert Owen | 60. Thelma Walker |
| 61. Steve Double | 62. Joseph Johnson | 63. Teresa Pearce | 64. Tom Watson |
| 65. David Drew | 66. Norman Lamb | 67. Toby Perkins | 68. Craig Whittaker |
| 69. Rosie Duffield | 70. David Lammy | 71. Jess Phillips | 72. Chris Williamson |
| 73. Angela Eagle | 74. Chris Law | 75. Jo Platt | 76. Mike Wood |
| 77. Maria Eagle | 78. Karen Lee | 79. Luke Pollard | |

STAYING CLOSE PILOTS

We continue to engage with the Staying Close Pilots, see below, as best we can though our ability to do so remains challenged by cost and time.

Our message remains the same – please incorporate as much of the CARINGTEAMS theme as is possible and desired by the young people for whom you are caring. Some seem closer to this than others but perhaps that's in the nature of a Pilot programme. They are to be reviewed in February 2019 and we have been happy to accept an invitation from the Department for Education through Helen Grimes to be part of that process.

Of course, we'd love to engage with Mr Zahawi too but thus far he seems determined not to enter into any dialogue with us at any level – the offer remains open.

Staying Close Pilots Projects: Break Charity, Bristol City Council, Fair Ways, North East Lincolnshire Council, North Tyneside Council, Portsmouth City Council, St Christopher's Fellowship, Suffolk County Council.

CARE EXPERIENCED PEOPLE CONFERENCE



Some of you may have come across the group who have been working extremely hard to set up a conference for and of Care Experienced People. Indeed, many of that group have been former Board Members of ECLCM. They have done an amazing job in raising funds, awareness and interest to set up the conference which will be taking place next April. You can find them on Twitter at @Careexpconf

The message below is an unedited piece which we have gladly agreed to including in this Newsletter

“The conference for care experienced people of all ages” (Careexpconf) – Some people have asked “Why is that necessary when kids in care and careleavers are routinely consulted already about decisions made about them?” That’s the point – they’re not!

Consider – if you were wanting to buy a car that was reliable and value for money, what would the important considerations be and who would you ask for advice? Well, you might start by considering what you personally wanted from the car – its make, colour, performance, cost, etc. You might sensibly seek the advice of someone who knew how cars work who could check the engine and make sure everything was working properly and it was value for money. It would also be really useful to check with someone who had driven a car like that and could tell you how reliable and comfortable it was, how it drives and what its strengths and weakness are. Indeed, these considerations would be a vital part of your decision-making process. All makes good sense.

These are common sense principles. Oddly, these common-sense principles are not always followed when planning or making decisions about children in care, child care policies, strategies and practices. As we would when buying a car, ‘experts’ are usually consulted who can advise on possible initiatives, priorities and costing. These are usually experienced professionals involved in planning and delivering existing services who can design models of care that meet current legislation, national guidelines. These experts can advise about currently accepted good practice and what was considered to be value for money.

Just as in buying a car, the views of those likely to use the service would usually be sought about what they wanted from the service. Focus groups of selected young people are a common way of eliciting their views. Because of the age and status, it is probable that few if any of the young people consulted will have much if any prior experience of using the service they are being asked about, but they are

able to say what they think they might like much as they might when buying a new car without ever having driven one.

Unlike the car buying analogy, what rarely if ever happens when formulating new child care policy is any significant consultation with care experienced people who have actually had experience of the service being planned and understand its strengths and weaknesses. They understand the realities of using the service through first-hand experience of having 'lived' it. This group are the only ones who have actually experienced "outcomes". These are the people who have "driven the car" and understand how it performs in the earlier example. Their input is critical.

"Outcomes" are a popular term in child care practice. They are occurrences that professionals speak of a great deal and indeed, regulators have standards that when considered together, can apparently predict them. However, it would be very rare for any professional social worker or regulator to follow up on service provision by routinely consulting those how have lived the experience, care leavers and care experienced adults of all ages, to learn how effectively the service is in practice and what are the real outcomes, born of lived experience.

"Outcomes" determined without reference to direct first-hand experience are in reality judgements about service outputs. Consulting only children yet to receive a service and those experts who deliver services does not offer any opportunity to realistically assess the effectiveness of the service.

One of the major objectives of the "CareExpConf" conference is to provide that "missing link" in considering the effectiveness of current and future service provision. Decision makers need to know about what young people in care aspire to in their future after care so they can seek to provide it. They also need to know how effectively the care they currently provide prepares young people for their future after care, enabling them to take advantage of opportunities they are given.

"CareExpConf", more fully, the conference for care experienced people of all ages is a platform for the care experienced family to come together as one. They will be supported to join together and jointly consider the realities of care from their collective perspective – care in years gone past, the care being offered today, and what sort of care they would like to see tomorrow. The care family will bring a perspective of care unique to them, led by lived experience, one which the experts who know about models, systems, statistics and value for money can only speculate about.

However, knowing what care is really like, and knowing what care should be like, are not enough alone. Like the car analogy, the "mechanic" is needed to join the team to provide the vehicle for change. This partnership of care experienced people of all ages and child care professionals in all their guises has the capability to change the way that care is provided radically. It has the potential to improve real outcomes for children leaving care whilst challenging stigma and discrimination. "Tis a consummation devoutly to be wished", as someone much cleverer than me once said. CareExpConf will be the first step towards achieving that.

But CareExpConf is so much more than an initiative to improve an ailing care system. So very much more. All care experienced people know the feelings of worthlessness, self-doubt, isolation, "differentness", and so many more negative feelings. Being talked about, being excluded from real decision making, being seen as a 'case' and not a person are all feelings known to care experienced people. These feelings are reinforced for so many by how they are treated by corporate parents, those who care for them and Society at large. That is a hard message for many to hear – but it remains true. CareExpConf will bring together care experienced people in all their glorious diversity, confidence, creativity, passion and optimism. It will include members of the care experienced family from the professions and trades in Society – Doctors, lawyers, university professors, social workers, plumbers, engineers, artists, writers, and so many more. Ordinary people who have achieved extraordinary things in life in the face of disadvantage.

CareExpConf will celebrate the creativity and imagination of the care experienced family – their art, music, poetry, passion and optimism. For possibly the first time in their lives for some, care experienced people will be in a positive environment where they are celebrated and treated for what they are – ordinary people who can achieve anything with support, encouragement and opportunity. At its best, CareExpConf will offer more than just an opportunity for care experienced people to come together as one. It will offer a loving family experience.

ONE STOP SOCIAL CONVENTION

Matt Hughes who operates One Stop Social (onestopsocial.co.uk) and has been a dedicated follower of ECLCM for some time has kindly offered us a stall at a convention taking place at Park Plaza Riverbank Hotel (SE17TJ) in London on 24th January 2019. Now this is at very considerable cost to Matt as normally stalls go for a large amount of money. We plan to take up his very generous offer so, if you can come along and meet us

AND FINALLY

We've just celebrated 5 years of existence. Well celebrated is the wrong word actually because that's 5 more years in which children leaving residential care have been falling off 'the care cliff', 5 more years when they have not had the opportunity to Stay Put in their Children's Home. I sincerely hope that with your help another 5 years won't be wasted.

To all our friends, supporters and colleagues. Merry Christmas and a very Happy New Year

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



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Ed Nixon
ECLCM Chairman