



EVERY CHILD LEAVING CARE MATTERS



Campaign Newsletter - A letter from the Chair

August 2016

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CARE MATTERS

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THE PETITION

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'Pop in Day'

The ECLCM team were able to spend several hours with an ECLCM stand in Portcullis House opposite the Houses of Parliament on 5th July, thanks to our wonderful patron Emma Lewell-Buck, MP for South Shields, and the unstinting help of her Parliamentary Assistant, Michelle Gibbon. We (Paula Doherty) worked slavishly in contacting every single MP by email prior to the event and Michelle, on Emma's behalf invited MPs and peers to visit us and hear what the ECLCM campaign was all about. We were graced by visits from MPs and peers from each of the major political parties, a demonstration that our cause is a cross party issue. Additionally, and thanks to Paula's work we also received many apologies from MP's who were unable to attend but offered their support and good wishes to us. ECLCM is not affiliated to any political party. We received visits from

Catherine Mc Kinnell MP, Labour Newcastle north
Lucy Allen MP Conservative, Telford
Mike Wood MP Conservative, Dudley South
Sir David Ames MP, Conservative, Southend West
Jim Shannon MP, DUP Strangford, Northern Ireland
Jeff Smith MP Labour, Manchester Withington
Tom McNally, Liberal Democrat peer
Khalid Mahmood MP, Labour Birmingham Perry Barr
Sarah Champion MP, Labour Rotherham
Baroness Fiona Hodgson conservative peer
Alex Cunningham MP, Labour Stockton North
Bill Esterson MP, Labour Sefton Central
Holly Lynch MP, Labour Halifax
Robin Walker MP, Conservative Worcester
Andy McDonald MP, Labour Middlesborough
George Howarth MP, Labour Knowsley
Emma Lewell-Buck MP Labour South Shields





All the decision makers who visited our stall expressed sympathy for our aim to achieve the option to 'Stay Put' for all young people leaving care up to the age of 21. A very successful event which allowed decision makers to hear directly from us what ECLCM stands for. We have yet to discuss our case with anyone face to face and fail to convince them of the justice of our cause. Many formally declared support for the campaign and as you would expect we invited them to pose for a photograph with (individual) team members – which can be viewed, if you haven't already come across them on social media, on our website ECLCM.org. Given the timing of the event – shortly after the Brexit vote and the consequential discussions in both the Government and Official

Opposition parties - we were absolutely delighted with the number of individuals who found the time to visit us and we judge the event to have been an unqualified success and further step towards equality of options for all care leavers, regardless of their placement, as they reach the age of eighteen

Our thanks was extended (and is reiterated here for all to see) to Emma and Michelle for their wonderful help on the day. We know that we have some energy in our team but Michelle would hold her own with anyone in terms of industry and what we perceived to be a real commitment to what we and Emma are trying to persuade others to legislate for.

Ian Dickson

Pop in Day part 2

Ian has provided a full and very helpful account of the day I would just like to add my thanks and congratulations to the whole team for the magnificent job that they did. Whilst it's sometimes said that there is no 'I' in team I know that I can speak for our team in saying that they were glad we have a Jane Billows in ours and that for the day in Westminster we had a Michelle Gribbon, Emma Lewell-Buck's parliamentary assistant.

Since then we have unleashed (well actually he unleashed himself) Ian Gould on social media tracking down and soliciting (very successfully) the support of even more MP's. In the next Newsletter I will try to produce an up to date list of all those who have 'declared' for our campaign. If you are in doubt as to whether your local MP has done so, please do get in touch with him/her and ask the question "Are you supportive of the aims of the Every Child Leaving Care Matters Campaign?" If they are, then please let us know (it would be courteous to inform them that you will be doing so) in order that we can contact them. If they are not, then please do ask "Why?" and do what you can to persuade them to 'sign up.'

Sanctuary House – Season Ticket Holders

Ian Dickson and I have made two visits to Sanctuary House, the home of the DfE in the course of the last few weeks.

On 16th June we were delighted to accept an invitation from the Children's Commissioner, Anne Longfield to meet with her and discuss the campaign. We both

considered it to have been a most useful meeting and we hope that Anne did too.



Whilst not strictly related to the campaign it was good to hear of a range of initiatives that Anne and her team have introduced or are in the process of introducing to improve services to and understanding of the needs of children in care. Anne was (more than politely)

interested in the campaign and had clearly ensured that she was very familiar with what we have been up to over the period that we have been in existence. I certainly wouldn't wish to compromise her, given her position, but I think it would be reasonable to suggest that she is certainly sympathetic to our cause and will support anything that genuinely seeks to improve the opportunities and outcomes for care leavers.

Then on 22nd July we were invited back to discuss our version of 'Staying Close' with a small group of senior civil servants. This was directly as a result of Sir Martin Narey's recommendation that ECLCM should be invited to be part of the discussions about the implementation of his recommendations in relation to Staying Close. Ian and I were, even at the stage that we were travelling down for the meeting, uncertain as to how things might work out and if we were in the same book, let alone on the same page as those we were about to meet when it comes to precisely what Staying Close might mean. We obviously did know that our definition of the term differs vastly from that offered by others in the last year - which is not new, indeed it has been sporadically in practice since the 1980's - where care leavers are loosely invited to stay in touch with their former children's home or perhaps even 'live in premises on the grounds' of that children's home - an anachronism if ever there is one. We were met and warmly welcomed by the person (I'm not sure of the protocol for naming individuals in situations like this, so I will avoid doing so for fear of breaching some rule) who will be leading on the exploration and development of pilots for Staying Close. He and his two colleagues opened the meeting by asking what our understanding of Staying Close is and how we saw it going forward. We found this to be an extremely useful starting point as we were given the impression - which I am certain it is accurate - that there was no set agenda and we were being invited to help create one. We outlined the discussion that we had had with Sir Martin and described Staying Close as we see it. Critically for us this will involve young people leaving a children's home knowing that that same children's home and the staff that they have come to trust will play a key role in their future. This will further involve children's homes being registered to help create and deliver a customised support package for every young person who takes up the option to stay close. It will also involve an implicit understanding that young

people will not only be welcome to return to their (children's) home on a regular basis, for meals or to do laundry for example, but they will be expected and very much welcomed to do so. Their key workers and indeed other staff from the home will be the ones offering and delivering support in the community. Other young people will, as they do now be enabled to continue to live in their (children's) home if this is assessed as being in their best interest and choice. There are many other aspects of what we described to Sir Martin but this is not the time or place to elucidate upon them, I think.

I believe, and I feel that this is a view shared by Ian, that the nature and spirit of the meeting was one of real partnership with a will to progress what we had suggested to Sir Martin as a potential way forward for young people leaving residential care. I have no sense whatsoever of tokenism, rather a determination that a way forward must be found to offer better support and life chances for children leaving residential care and (implicitly) for those leaving all forms of care. Obviously we now await to see what comes next but we made it very clear that we would not only like to but would hope to be included, again as suggested by Sir Martin, in any working groups established to design and monitor pilot programmes and ultimately design a system fit for legislation. Clearly Sir Martin's report was commissioned directly by David Cameron and his departure along with that of Nicky Morgan could have an impact. However, Mr Timpson remains as Children's Minister and we can only hope that Theresa May and Justine Greening will look favourably on Sir Martin's recommendations and allow progress to be made. ECLCM has remained steadfastly unaligned to any political party or individual within parties so we hope that we will be given the opportunity to speak for our supporters in helping create a meaningful and improved way forward for care leavers to make a successful transition to adulthood.

The person taking the lead on the project has kept in regular contact with us and recently said that he hopes to have a draft proposal available in w.c.15th August for us to consider and comment upon.

Obviously we are at what I think is the start of a possibly long journey but it appears to have started well.

Presentation to NorthWest Lead Councillors at Salford Quays



The 'Chuckle Brothers hit the road yet again on 15th July when, thanks to Cllr Matthew Tomlinson from Lancashire we were invited to make a presentation to a meeting of (if not all) many of the leads from Local Authorities in the North West. As well as Matthew it was great to see friendly faces like Cllr Jean Carter from Warrington and Cllr Maureen Bateman from Blackburn with Darwen in the audience. Going on half way through a Friday afternoon after everyone had enjoyed what looked a decent lunch could have been a disaster. However, we were thrilled with the responses from so many people in the room who were animated and obviously engaged by what we had to say about the campaign but more importantly the reason why it exists. I stand to be corrected but I can't recall hearing a single dissenting voice in the room when it came to offering support to young people remaining in or 'close to' care until twenty-one and in fact supported way beyond that. Each and all were keen to tell us what their LA's are variously trying to do to offer support for care leavers and there seemed to be a genuine enthusiasm for the subject – so much so that we overran our time.

The Petition

With all that has been going on its sometimes easy to forget that in the (relative) background our petition is still clicking up numbers slowly but surely and this remains one of our most powerful tools in the fight to achieve change for the better for all care leavers. As well as our two ambassadors, Ben and Danni we have some real stalwarts out there supporting us relentlessly on Twitter and Facebook encouraging others to sign. It's always dangerous (particularly with a memory as unreliable as mine) to name some of the stars of the campaign on Twitter and elsewhere but (and please don't be offended if I forget you, there are after all over 11,000 of you!) folk like Nikki Leddingham, the fantastic Kathy Evans, Dee, E J Large, Lucia Irvine, Northern Star, Lynn Findlay together with organisations such as Children England, Respect Yourself, Drive Forward, The Rees Foundation, Madlug and TACT really help to keep us going and of course without Chris Doyle (@hubprojects) we simply wouldn't have a website. We shall forever be grateful to all of you and the countless others who contribute to our energy being sustained.

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Budding writers out there?

Our Newsletter is really a campaign Newsletter and we would like to invite all of you out there to contribute to it. Ask questions, write a letter, write a blog or an article, tell us of your own experiences and we will happily try to include them in a forthcoming issue. Much as I enjoy writing down and circulating my streams of consciousness I am acutely aware that this is a campaign Newsletter not vehicle for me to preach and as such I would dearly love contributions from others please.

Quite separately we continue to invite care leavers of any age to share (privately) with us their own stories which we continue to seek in the hope of publishing something once this campaign is over.

And finally

There may be times when you feel that we are not as conspicuous (or simply 'loud') in social media and that our profile is in danger of slipping. I hope that you will appreciate that we are in a period when a great deal of work and organisation is in process 'behind' the scenes – though as I hope you will appreciate from our frank reporting of events that we have been involved in that we remain as transparent as ever – and this does not mean that we are slowing down, just working differently. We sincerely hope that when Parliament returns in September that we will be ready to look forward to legislation being written, debated and eventually passed that will genuinely mean that all care leavers will have better options for their futures.

Ed Nixon
ECLCM Chairman



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