



EVERY CHILD



LEAVING CARE MATTERS

Campaign Newsletter – A letter from the Chair

August 2021



In this Issue

- Our board
- The Care Review
- Politicians

It's strange but when on the one hand nothing much seems to be happening because of the pandemic along comes a Care Review that takes up a great deal of time and energy.

This is my rather weak excuse for not having written a Newsletter sooner, sorry.

On a more serious note, however, it does seem that the review has understandably taken front and centre stage over the last several months and inevitably it will take up some of the text in this Newsletter.

ECLCM BOARD



Yes we have met, yes it's been virtual, but we have most certainly not stood still – either separately or as a group. We still have a strong team with Ben, Jane, Rob, Fiona having been joined by Gareth Lancaster, oh, and me. We are supported by our great group of Ambassadors Ian Gould, Nikki Leddingham, Julie Warren-Sykes, Thomas Keaney and Annie Bishop.

I must say a word or two about Mr Gould – what a phenomenon! His prodigious tweeting as he swims makes the man a legend in my opinion. He devotes so much time to supporting our campaign I wonder that he can do anything else yet he enhances a number of other forums discussing, debating and challenging the process being followed by the care review; is part of the campaign to stop what we believe is a heinous proposal to **register and inspect homes not providing care** for children of sixteen and seventeen – more later on this – continues his mission following the (now) failed privatisation of the Probation service and even manages to tell us about his delicious looking brunches every day that he enjoys in between gardening and swimming. I actually believe he is at least twins and possibly triplets! Thank you Ian for all you do to try to improve the lives and outcomes for children in care.

We have given some thought to increasing the Board size – if for no other reason than to give you a change of author of these Newsletters- but have decided it's not the time to do so and we need to allow the country to return to a form of 'normal'. Gareth (Gaz) has joined our merry band and is

currently in the process of enlivening our Facebook account which has rather fallen into retirement. He has, generously, offered to establish a new account and then try to transfer or link to the old account. We will let you know when all of this has been achieved either in a newsletter and or via Twitter or Facebook. He is also on a mission to see if anyone can help us connect with a high profile personality. This may sound desperate, but we really need to boost the momentum and the reality is that social media is the best way to do it. Amazing individuals such as Marcus Rashford has shown us that if they lend their names – or in his case magnificently actually lead a campaign – to a cause then the impact is huge. We know that there will be many such individuals out there who would, if they but knew of the discrimination that our campaign seeks to challenge, back us. It's just that we (obviously) don't know any such individuals. Quite unashamedly I ask now that if anyone reading this does know someone who they feel might be able to help us in this way then please do ask them and if they are willing to lend their name to the campaign just let any of us know. We will not expect anything of them save for their explicit support by putting something out on social media platforms that they may already use. Obviously, if they wished to offer more time we would gratefully accept it, but this is absolutely not a requirement, and we would promise not to bother them further.

THE CARE REVIEW

Those who have read this Newsletter over the last seven years will know that I am generally quite happy to use a little license from time to time. However I cannot, with any integrity, write anything about the Independent Care Review in an ECLCM Newsletter that purports to represent the views of the ECLCM Board having expressed some of my own opinions in a rather extensive open letter to Mr MacAlister on our website <https://eclcm.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/210710-Dear-Mr-MacAlister.pdf> which quite correctly carries a statement saying that the comments are mine and mine alone. Furthermore, I have contributed to other articles in 'Children and Young People Now' in my own right and I will leave it at that.

Factually, it is now approaching half way through its calendar lifespan, the 'Case for Change' has been published and thus far I am unaware that it has published anything on the matter of the inequality of opportunity between foster and residential care leavers on the question of Staying Put. Form your own opinions and feel free to share them on social media, in your workplace, in the pub or whenever you get the chance – please.

POLITICIANS

Well, the first and best bit of news is that Holly Lynch (MP for Halifax) has kindly accepted an invitation to be our third patron joining Bill Esterson (MP for Sefton Central) and Emma Lewell-Buck (MP for South Shields). We have obviously thanked her personally, but this is a very public acknowledgement of our gratitude for adding her political weight to the campaign. For those of you who follow our Twitter story you will already know that Holly, Bill and Emma sent a great letter to The Minister for Children. We have taken the liberty of reproducing both letters below.

HOLLY LYNCH MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Children and Families
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
London
SW1P 3BT

8 April 2021

Dear Minister,

We write to you as patrons and supporters of the Every Child Leaving Care Matters campaign, to share our concerns regarding the disparity between the treatment of looked after children in foster care and children who remain in residential care. The former are permitted to live with their families until the age of 21, while children in residential settings risk being asked to leave at the age of 18.

In April 2014, the passage of the Children and Families Act enshrined in law the provision for fostered young people to stay with their foster families when they reach 18, if both parties were to agree. This change came as a result of long campaigns from charity groups such as the Fostering Network and was welcomed by all. It meant that fostered children had 3 additional years of security and safety, allowing them more adequate time to prepare for the next stages of their lives. However, no such commitment was made to children who remained in residential settings, who to this day still face being discharged from care at the age of 18.

This disparity brings a range of concerns for children in the care system. It creates a 'two tier' system, whereby children who have been fostered receive support for longer than those who remain in residential facilities.

We support the campaign to increase the age that individuals may stay in residential care to 21, on par with the current regulations for those who have foster families. Parity in this instance is essential in supporting thousands of young people every year, and ending the discrimination currently faced by those in residential care.

We would like to request a meeting with ourselves, the signatories of this letter, as well as representatives of the campaign group Every Child Leaving Care Matters to discuss this issue, and to hopefully begin positive work towards a solution.

We look forward to receiving your response.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Holly Lynch".

Holly Lynch MP

Please reply to:-

Office of Holly Lynch MP, Elsie Whiteley Innovation Centre, Hopwood Lane, Halifax, HX1 5ER
Tel: 01422 399515 Email: holly.lynch.mp@parliament.uk

E. Sewell-Buck

Emma Lewell-Buck MP
Patron of the Every Child Leaving Care Matters campaign

Bill Esterson

Bill Esterson MP
Patron of the Every Child Leaving Care Matters campaign

Sadly the response was a little underwhelming



2021-0022194VFPO

Vicky Ford MP

Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families
Sanctuary Buildings 20 Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

Holly Lynch MP
By email: holly.lynch.mp@parliament.uk

4 May 2021

Dear Holly,

Thank you for your letter of 8 April, as patrons of the Every Child Leaving Care Matters campaign, about support for looked-after young people transitioning from residential care to adulthood. I would be grateful if you could share a copy of this reply with your co-signatories.

May I begin by wishing you and your co-signatories well in these challenging times.

Our ambitions for looked-after children and care leavers are the same as for any other children and young people. That they have good health and wellbeing, can reach their full educational and employment potential, and make a positive contribution to society.

As you are aware, young people leaving care constitute one of the most vulnerable groups in our society, and the State has a moral obligation to support them as they make the difficult transition to adulthood and independent living.

The government has provided £9.2 million over four years to pilot Staying Close in eight local areas, and to address the 'cliff edge' faced by young people leaving residential care.

Staying Close provides an enhanced support package that is comparable to the option to Stay Put that exists for young people leaving foster care.

It includes an offer of move-on accommodation, alongside a package of practical and emotional support (an average of 5-10 hours a week dependent on needs), provided, if possible, by a member of staff from their former children's home who they know and trust.

Thank you for writing about this important matter.

Yours sincerely,

Vicky Ford

Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families

She writes that the government's ambitions for looked after children and care leavers are the same as for any other children. Well frankly they can be as ambitious as they like but they're not delivering. We discriminate against care leavers from residential care by denying them Staying Put – simple.

She adds that Staying Close is available and that it is a comparable option to Staying Put – NO IT IS NOT. It was never, and we had a large part in defining it, an alternative to Staying Put but as far as we were and are concerned the only 'stepping stone' on offer in the Narey Review of Residential Child Care in England. I have met Ms Ford and told her that. I have met Josh MacAlister and been equally clear. In her letter to our Patrons she actually recognises that, at its best it offers 5 –10 hours of support per week (IF POSSIBLE). So what about the other 158 – 163 hours? Presumably they are considered not to need support, let alone care for over 94% - 97% of the week? Again, I presume, this would be an acceptable standard for our MP's children?

Holly, Bill and Emma will, naturally continue to challenge such nonsense and whilst we are aware that the Labour Party as a whole apparently support Staying Put for all Care Leavers – as ensured by Emma in the Party Manifesto prior to the last election – we really do need the Front Bench to be shouting this loud and often. Once would be a start. Thanks to Bill, I have had the opportunity to speak directly to Kate Green, Shadow Secretary of State for Education and Tulip Sidiq, Shadow Children's Minister. Both were receptive to my presentation of the case for @Rescareto21 and Tulip followed this up by publicly offering her support on Twitter I sense that Kate had greater priorities and she has remained silent on the matter since our conversations several months ago which is disappointing.

With our Patrons support we will, of course keep trying and hopefully when Parliament returns after the summer recess, we will be at Westminster for an event arranged by our Patrons. As, when and if we get a date and time we will let people know and any and all will be most welcome to join us.

Whilst we are on the matter of 'care' there is another piece of legal neglect on its way towards statutory endorsement. The Government proposes to introduce a set of regulations and standards that will make it illegal for Unregulated homes to operate. A cause for celebration perhaps? A final recognition that the crimes committed against some children in some such placements made by Local Authorities will be no more? That the Criminal and Sexual exploitation of children and young adults by some of those operating and experienced by many who are in some such placements can no longer be tolerated? Well, not exactly. In reality its more of a denial of the fact that children aged 16 and up to 18 don't need care i.e. to be cared for and about by those accommodating them. The Government has introduced legislation that will come into force in September of this year that will outlaw placements for children under 16 that do not provide care. So far, so good. However, that same legislation will enable children of 16 and 17 to be placed in homes where there is **no care**. Very soon @Rescareto21 could be @Rescareto18. We are in grave danger of going backwards very fast indeed. What has been said about this – well the Independent Care Review team appears to have welcomed the proposed legislation in its entirety. Save for Emma Lewell-Buck I can find no record of the Labour Party or M.P.'s from other parties speaking out publicly against the proposal. It has been left to The Together Trust and Article 39, with respect two moderately small charities, to spearhead opposition and legal challenge to the Government's proposal and please do take a moment to check out their campaign here <https://secure.togethertrust.org.uk/uk-government-keep-caring> and if you can add your support or at least your signature. Again in another example of shameless plagiarism I include the essence of their position below:

UK government: We want you to keep caring

We believe that every child in care should be guaranteed care up to the age of 18 but new government legislation will leave thousands of children without care every year.*

The government has introduced new legislation that, from September 2021, will ban councils from putting children aged 15 or younger in unregulated accommodation such as bedsits, flats and shared housing.

Ministers say 16 and 17 year-olds don't need this protection and they can manage in accommodation where they don't receive any care.

This decision has let down thousands of children and is a serious blow to the many organisations and care experienced people who have been campaigning for better regulation.

Instead of making sure all children in care receive care, the government has promised national standards for accommodation for 16 and 17 year-olds.

But these standards will deliberately omit care.

This is because quality standards already exist for establishments which provide children with care and accommodation (children's homes standards) and they must be followed by law.

The government's actions create a two-tier care system where children aged 15 and younger are guaranteed care, and those aged 16 and 17 can go without.

We are calling on you to join us and stand up for the children this disastrous policy decision will affect.

**At any one time there are around 6,000 children in care living in unregulated homes in England. However, the Children's Commissioner for England found that 12,800 children in care spent some time in unregulated provision across the year in 2018/19".*

ECLCM has given its support.

AND SO ...

I'm aware that I, let alone anyone else involved in ECLCM (apart from Ian Gould), have not been exactly prolific in recent months when it comes to the campaign. Sometimes other things, often in my case related to other activities impacting on care leavers demand and get my time and attention. Not including, I might add, a very recent request from a person tangentially involved in the Independent Care Review who emailed me asking if I could advise them on a plan they have for, "...opening up a property for 16 plus to live in" and "...was wondering if you can help me know what steps I need to take in order to set up".

Came to the wrong person I'm afraid and I politely replied with more or less those words. We do, however, keep going and will continue to do so. Once again I cordially invite anyone who would like to write a piece for this Newsletter or our website to get in touch, we'd be delighted to hear from you. I don't always remember to check ECLCM emails daily but to the best of my knowledge I have never actually missed one altogether, so I promise I'll get back to you.

Ed Nixon
ECLCM Chairman



Twitter



Facebook