

The Independent Care Review.

“Once in a generation”. What exactly does that mean? The Oxford Dictionary suggests, “*all the people who were born at about the same time*”.

What follows is all statistically correct and accepted but I have decided not to quote sources because others have already done so. I have focussed on a ‘generation’ because that’s what the leader of the Independent Care Review suggested it was – a once in a generation review.

Getting back to the point of what a generation is, for most people in our society it’s probably somewhere between 25 and 30 years. For Care leavers it is considerably less. Whilst most young adults tend to leave home at around 25, 26, or 27, for Care Leavers, this can be and often is as young as 16. It follows, not necessarily but in fact, that most children of Care Leavers are born when their parents are around and about the age of 18 to 20. For many Care Leavers this is closer to 16 or 17. Things balance out though, because Care Leavers also tend to die a lot younger than those who have not experienced state care. By the age of 32, a Care Leaver may be a grandparent, at 48 a great grandparent when most in society might consider that too early to even be a grandparent. Why is this? One of the key factors is that Care Leavers are far more likely (perhaps 60 more 70 times more likely) to have their children taken into care. This is odd, isn’t it. These people have the wealthiest, most resourceful and stable (?) parents in the world – the State. Yet they are systematically experiencing poor parenting, should their parents be prosecuted for this? There could be a good argument for doing so but the problem is that the State is an amorphous thing and excellent at deflecting responsibility away from itself and onto ‘their’ children. That is why some Care Leaver’s children are taken into care simply because their parent(s) is /are Care Leavers. It’s an odd one that because the assumption is that this young woman and, or man is not suitable to be a good and caring parent simply because she was brought up in care. Who delivered the care, well we did. Who says they can’t care for their children because they have a care history – we do.

So the question must be asked, if the recent independent care review is a “Once in a generation” opportunity then is this to be in Care Leaver’s time or the rest of society’s time? As it stands relatively newly off the press, and as yet unchallenged in a formal sense I can’t help but hope that if it were for a generation it will be a care leavers generation. Why? Because whilst there are aspects that may help improve outcomes for Care Leavers, there is much that represents failed opportunities to make a real difference and other parts that are, frankly unimaginably poor.

In 1872 Jules Verne, sometimes called “the father of science fiction” published “Around the world in 80 days”. 150 years later we have Mr Josh MacAlister publishing his ‘Independent Care Review’, which may come to be known as ‘Change the Care System in 80 ways’. Jules Verne had not circumnavigated the world but had a vivid imagination and excellent story telling skills. Josh MacAlister had never been in, worked in or had any particular knowledge of the Care System. It remains to be seen how good his story telling skills are. Some, I imagine, will admire the fact that he has in only fifteen months (let’s say 450 days) found his way around the Care System sufficiently well to make his 80 recommendations to reform it. Others will say

that in his tour he has missed vitally important nuances by concentrating on his timetable rather than focusing in on key factors. Yet others will say that prior to setting off his route had been meticulously planned for him and that his conclusions were inevitable. Personally, I have been 'navigating' the care system for what may be, based on my previous speculation four generations of children in care. In that time I have visited many 'areas' within the system, Family Support; Child Protection (as Safeguarding used to be called), working with Looked After Children – who start off by carrying that dreadful name, 'A LAC child', burden and in my experience have and will always prefer to be described as children in care, as a social worker and manager and then as a manager of children's homes, foster, adoption teams and an emergent Leaving Care Team in a Local Authority. I was then CEO of a small but rather good independent company caring for and educating in a therapeutic environment a total of about 60 children in children's, homes and foster care. Finally, I became an independent consultant – easy in children's social care because anyone can call themselves a consultant – working alone and also with the Independent Children's Homes Association – when it was just for Independent Children's Homes. I've stopped now apart from my work associated with the Every Child Leaving Care Matters Campaign for the last nine plus years and as a Trustee of Pure Insight – which is rightly lauded in Mr MacAlister's review - and Advisory Board Member of Career Matters and as an associate of the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care. So now I'm 'working with Care Leavers'. Guilt perhaps? Trying to pay back for some of the mistakes I made? I really don't know and that's for others to judge. It's an ambition of mine, foolhardy at my age I know, that we might have a care system where few if any would need to work supporting care leavers as their care experience would be so positive that by 18, 21 or 25 years of age (leaving care age does still seem to be a bit of a lottery) they wouldn't need quite so much support. I wonder if Mr MacAlister's report will help me decide that my ambition is within touching distance?

Where to start in offering some thoughts? Following it through page by page would be boring and repetitive so I guess what follows is a stream of consciousness – some might, having read it, suggest unconsciousness. It does not address all aspects of the review and is a very personal reflection on parts that I feel able and qualified to offer an informed comment. It is written mainly for my own benefit and I do not expect or even imagine that it will be widely read but if I don't get some of my thoughts down on paper they will haunt me up to the point when I finally leave social care behind me in the hope that the next generation will be more successful than I in being part of a just, balanced and empathetic children's social care system where children are genuinely at the centre of the thinking of those empowered to change it for the better.

Leaving a sense of hopelessness behind let's move on to the report, or at least aspects of it in a little more detail. In doing so let's remember that every single person who comes into contact with children's (social) services is likely to be in some form of crisis. Nobody chooses to engage with a service designed to catch them in a safety net. The entities that we now refer to as Adult and Children's services had as their predecessors the various 'welfare services'. When I joined social services it was in its infancy having just replaced the child welfare or mental health welfare service or yet others of a similar name. The functions hadn't changed much, though they have evolved in the 48 years since the Seebohm Report had changed things. Most

of the children and families I visited on my 'patch' on the outskirts of Liverpool still referred to me as a 'Wellie' (or perhaps it was 'Wally?'). A young boy who lived in a children's home sized foster home set up a series of football matches the 'Scallies versus the Wellies' were the boys more or less legitimately kicked the shins off us in a sports hall in Skelmersdale on a regular basis. That boy is now 60, his name is Brian, and he still works as a (brilliant) residential child care worker, I am his daughter's substitute granddad. I guess there is a relationship there.

The Cambridge dictionary offers the following definition of 'welfare',

"help given, especially by the state or an organisation, to people who need it, especially because they do not have enough money".

In those days we called people 'clients' then "service users' and now god knows what. They are just people; our travels through political correctness have gained us nothing. Most of those who seek help from, or increasingly have help imposed upon them by Children's Services are poor. Poverty brings many things, almost none of them good. It does stress families and in a minority of cases makes them struggle. In few cases is poverty the fault of the poor person. But poverty often leads to children entering care, their children are more likely (60-70 times more likely) to enter care too. Make no mistake we fail children in care – not we social workers or foster carers or residential staff alone but society as a whole. The review comes up with a range of ideas and recommendations. Some of which I will comment on, others not. Some people may read this and thank you for that but I'm confident that it will not be read by those who need to read it and any other similar offerings – our political leadership.

Advocates for every child

Let's start with a contentious one, several actually because like dominoes (I'm being very careful not to use Jenga – although surprisingly Mr MacAlister does refer to building blocks in his review¹). He sees all children in care having an advocate, that's positive; by having an advocate they can 'knock down' the need for both IRO's and Regulation 44 visitors. Of course whilst the appointment of an advocate is an, "opt out" 'choice', *"This system should be simplified by replacing a number of existing roles with truly independent advocacy for children that is opt-out, rather than opt-in"*. Obviously the first challenge is the 'opting' in or out. What about children who are too young, too impaired physically or emotionally or in some other way 'without capacity to make informed choices? What about children who, for whatever reason, decide that they don't want an advocate? As care will continue for some until they are 23 what will happen to those already in prison or the 12% of care leavers who are 'missing' i.e. Those about whom their LA has no idea where they may be? What

¹ *The goal of our reform programme – Relationships Protect - is to leave a legacy of a self-improving system, within which actors have high levels of freedom and responsibility. We propose six principles of reform, which are the building blocks that flow throughout the report and are set out in more detail in Chapter Nine.*

about the duplication of work for, maybe, four advocates visiting a children's home to see their four children but each having to take on the responsibility to complete whatever the equivalent of a Regulation 44 visit might turn out to be. What if the four advocates produce significantly different reports? These individuals will be taxed with knowing all of the new regulations for fostering and residential care if they are to take on the function of the Regulation 44 visitor. This includes but is not confined to all matters pertaining to the the running and management of, and recruitment processes for a children's home. In addition to this they will need to be familiar with all legislation pertaining to care. With IRO's 'disappearing' will it be the Advocate who will chair child protection conferences and reviews? If not how will these be done with independent oversight and control? If a child rejects the offer of an advocate and then changes her or his mind who will they tell? If they don't have an advocate will they be in placement with no independent oversight or effective scrutiny. The 'management' of advocates would fall to the Children's Commissioners service. I am entirely unsure about what this is predicated upon – it seems that the 'Help at hand' service is at the heart of it. I have personal experience – positive – of using this service for a child who was unhappy with his Care Plan. Their advocacy was helpful but limited by their self-proclaimed lack of knowledge of children's legislation! I appreciate that this could be bolstered to reach an acceptable standard, but would it also be expanded to ensure that it could offer line management and supervision to advocates to ensure they were capable of under taking the proposed considerable expansion in their role. How is it envisaged that this would happen and when? What reason is there to believe that those children in care who offered criticism of their IRO would prefer an advocate? It is suggested that many children are unhappy with the system involving IRO's? How many, what was the sample size? I fully accept that there can and should be changes to the system as it stands but if the only 'fact' that supports a change away from the current system is the question of the independence of IRO's because they are employed by the LA then what alternatives were considered? Continuity cannot be a reason unless there is some assurance, based on research that advocates remain in role for longer than do IRO's. Where is this assurance? Is it evidence based? What consideration was given to establishing a body responsible for all IRO's – rather like the Cafcass model? Personally, given the performance of Cafcass in recent years, the model and certainly not practice and performance is the only thing that could be learned from this organisation. What is the reason why it is assumed that in chairing meetings a senior officer from the LA would be more suitable and assume a greater degree of independence than an IRO. *“Thirdly, care planning meetings should be chaired by the manager of the social worker holding the case (or another experienced social worker), but no significant decisions should be made at a care review meeting without input from the advocate, unless the child has explicitly chosen to represent themselves”*. In line management terms this is absolutely closer than an IRO as such if any part of the decision to recommend discarding with IRO's as a consequence of their independence from the LA then this is counter intuitive. I am aware that we live in a disposable age with a tendency to discard not repair and I do see some flaws in the operation of the IRO system. I also see many strengths on this occasion I would implore those making decisions not to discard a somewhat flawed system but to fix it.

What of Reg 44 visitors and their extinction? Where is the evidence that this role fails to achieve its targets? Have children consistently and persistently told the review that the system doesn't work? If so how many children were canvassed for their views?

How many of that number (percentage) called for or indicated that they would seek change? Part of their role is, of course to visit unannounced. Is it anticipated that however many children are placed in the home their advocates will make unannounced visits and work through all of the data held about children, staffing, the maintenance of the building, risk assessments, compliance with Statement of Purpose in any new admissions of activities etc? Clearly these advocates will need to read case files of children other than their own so each child will have 1 -? Advocates reading their personal history – is this not counter to the confidentiality we offer children concerning their personal lives? Currently one person, the Reg 44 visitor, does this and the children most commonly have a good relationship with ‘their’ Reg 44 visitor and can express their willingness to have data shared with him/her. If Ofsted in their inspection determine that, let’s say one advocate, fails in their duty to fulfil their remit will that impact on the assessment and grading of the home? Certainly it does if a Reg 44 visitor fails and rightly so. Removing the Reg 44 visitor and IRO would seem to me to risk increasing a sense of institutionalisation to children’s homes as an increasingly high number of professionals will be required to visit on a regular basis.

In summary, I fully approve of the opportunity for all children in care to access advocacy services. However I absolutely oppose the discarding of IRO’s and Reg 44 visitors (separately and together) for the reasons given. Both systems operate reasonably well at present and by all means work to improve the structural independence of IRO’s but do not replace them with the advocates proposed – we should be enhancing children’s care experience, which an advocate could do, not engaging in an exercise that simply moves the pieces around the board.

Protected Characteristic

Moving on to the issue of recommending that care experience be recognised as a ‘Protected Characteristic’ I appreciate that by implementing this there is a risk of increased stigmatisation of care leavers however, the potential benefits, in my opinion, outweigh this. Obviously it would be for the care experienced person to use this to advantage in education, employment and other areas of life and as such this preserves their integrity. Fortunately care experience is not a visible characteristic and discrimination is not so obvious as it might be, for example other protected characteristic communities and as such I applaud this recommendation.

Family Help

The notion of Family Help Schemes is by no means new. We have had family centres, Sure Start and Family Hubs etc. for many years. Our unforgiveable mistake as a society is that we have allowed these things to fall by the wayside often to be re-invented sometime later and Family Help teams appear to be the new manifestation. At a time, such as I have never experienced in almost seven decades, the level of poverty and disadvantage to huge swathes of society has never been greater we must if we have a conscience do something and if Family Help schemes is the label that we attach to it then so be it. The crucial issue, which I feel the review fails to address, is the cause and true impact of poverty in England (and elsewhere in the UK) in 2022. **In relation to care it is a very simple formula Poverty =**

Stress within families² = rise in the numbers of children coming into care = increased cost to the state = cuts to services = more children coming into care. Why has the review had so little to say about this? The comments are perhaps summarised in “In developing our recommendations, we have actively considered these factors and have ensured our recommendations take account of them. Government must also explicitly recognise these factors and understand how they drive the need (and therefore the cost) for children’s social care up or down and, ultimately, have a wider plan to address them”. Care is a political issue, and the review has missed a golden opportunity to go further than this. What discussions have they engaged in with Government? How many conversations have taken place with The Rt Hon Michael Gove who was appointed Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities on 15 September 2021? Where are they recorded in the review? It is not enough to say that the review has boundaries. Unless it addressed this issue – and it seems not to have done so – then we really are, yet again, ‘rearranging the deckchairs on the Titanic’. Is it too late? No. Will it happen? I doubt it. If it doesn’t then however you address the care system, however many billions of pounds you recommend are spent on tinkering with the system then this review will have failed. This “bold review whimpers on the issue of Family help saying, “Recommend: Alongside recommendations to strengthen multi-agency partnerships and the role of the Director of Children’s Services, government should consider legislating to put the existence of multidisciplinary Family Help Teams on a statutory footing”. Government should **consider!** A bold review with belief in its findings would challenge the Government, if it was free to do so, by **demanding** that this happens. This is a whimper not the roar that families need to know that support will be given.

The economic argument is obvious, and I won’t attempt to replicate what others, far more competently than could I, have already done. Simply put it goes invest in the poorest families in our country to eradicate poverty and savings on the care system and its lifetime consequences will more than pay for the initial outlay. Failure to do so suggests to me that we are buying into the adage ‘the poor are always with us’. To go further into this requires yet another doctoral thesis of the role of the poor in a capitalist system. My comments, however, are, allegedly like the Independent Review, a-political but if we don’t alleviate poverty which is currently rising exponentially then we choose to have an ever expanding and almost certainly failing care system. We can develop the best Family Help (or as mentioned its predecessors) scheme imaginable, even plough in the 2 billion pounds but unless we address the issue of poverty we will, at best mitigate the problem of poverty and the review should indeed have been “bold’ and said so. I appreciate that this would require whole system change but that is exactly what is needed. The review talks about the importance of relationships, and I agree that this is a crucial area. However it focusses on the micro level – enabling children in care to build lasting and loving relationships. Who could disagree with this. Indeed in a discussion with Mr MacAlister during the course of the review I explained to him that I am fortunate enough to have built life-long relationships with many of the children I worked with in care, and I am by no means unique in this. However simply having the capacity for more to enjoy this is not an answer – it addresses the symptoms not the cause and I

² This stress may include any or all of the following consequences. Poor parenting/Neglect/Domestic Violence/Physical or emotional harm to children etc

will return to this later. The review should also recognise that systems – like the care system must recognise their relationship to other systems such as the judicial system, the legal system, the health system, the education system, and the economic system. That is what Systems Theory as discussed by Bruce Friedman and multiple others that I learned about as a raw unqualified social worker over forty years ago is all about. For those of a less academic leaning the same obvious truth is related in "*Dem Bones*" a spiritual song composed by author and songwriter James Weldon Johnson and his brother J Rosamond Johnson first recorded by The famous Myers Jubilee Singers almost a hundred years ago. Even E. M Forster gets in on the Act in 'Howards End' when he advises the reader on the fly sheet to 'Only connect'. The poor and children in care, not entirely synonymous but close, are 'disconnected from our society and unless and until it is appreciated that we must address this disconnect we will not achieve lasting improvement. The review fails to address this truth. We have, almost as a revelation in the review a recommendation that, "Recommendation: New legislation should be passed which broadens corporate parenting responsibilities across a wider set of public bodies and organisations". Whilst legislation may help (and I hope it does) this is a 'hearts and minds' issue. Reference is made many times in the review to the issue of corporate parenting, but this concept was introduced over thirty years ago in the Children Act 1989. New legislation will not in and of itself make any difference. It requires a much higher profile. The review takes lessons from Scotland but makes no comment that unlike Scotland our political leader in England has not to the best of my recollection taken any part in the review. Why not? Why has he not been front and centre of presentations and discussion like Nicola Sturgeon? Why has he not 'owned' the review as she has. Why has he not been centre stage at events with Mr MacAlister? As he hasn't why hasn't he? Why has the review not demanded his presence? Children in care are simply not 'a thing' for successive English Governments but there is not a word of criticism from the review team about this. Yes, I may be cynical, but this review has happened only because the, then, Government were badgered into promising a review in their election manifesto because all of the other parties had done so. I fear that it has been commissioned, rushed through with a cost neutral brief and as little "us" as is possible.

Leaving a sense of hopelessness behind let's move on to the report, or at least aspects of it in a little more detail. In doing so let's remember that every single person who comes into contact with children's (social) services is likely to be in some form of crisis. Nobody chooses to engage with a service designed to catch them in a safety net. The entities that we now refer to as Adult and Children's services had as their predecessors the various 'welfare services'. When I joined social services it was in its infancy having just replaced the child welfare or mental health welfare service or yet others of a similar name. The functions hadn't changed much, though they have evolved in the 48 years since the Seebohm report had changed things.

Things change, the terminology differs and however those who come to the attention of Children's Services are referred to, they are just people; our travels through political correctness have gained us nothing. Most of those who seek help from, or increasingly have help imposed upon them by Children's Services are poor. Poverty brings many things, almost none of them good. It does stress families and in a minority of cases makes them struggle. In few cases is poverty the fault of the poor

person. But poverty often leads to children entering care, their children are more likely (60-70 times more likely) to enter care too

Care Leavers

Where does the review consider and evaluate the Care Leaver Covenant?

“The Care Leaver Covenant is a national inclusion programme that supports care leavers aged 16-25 to live independently with opportunities” they say on their home page. The same organisation is now a good way into their second term of being awarded a large annual contract from Government. At the time of the initial contract the, then, Children’s Minister now Secretary of State for Education Nadhim Zahawi said, *“And Matthew Gordon, I remember when I first met Matthew to appoint them to deliver the covenant – it was one of the best decisions I’ve made”*. Clearly so, because Matthew’s organisation *Spectra* was the successful bidder when the Covenant was due for renewal.

This is a covenant, not a promise I note, that has been in existence for four years. Has the review considered if it has provided value for money? Whilst the review mentions the Covenant it does not *review* what it has achieved thus far. How can this be? It’s a review for goodness sake. How many jobs has the covenant made available to and have care leavers settled into permanent employment? How many apprenticeships have been taken up by care leavers? Is the covenant working? If so for whom? I work with care leavers; I know about care leavers – fine not on a massive scale few of the hundreds of care leavers I know has even heard of the covenant, let alone benefited from it. Not good is it? How many of all the care leavers consulted) and how many is that from the tens of thousands of those eligible for support have been asked about the covenant? I attended only one such meeting of Care Leavers with Mr MacAlister and Will Quince MP, but the Covenant was not mentioned? I accept and rejoice in the fact that the meeting was focussing on the model of Care Leaver support in an organisation for which I am a trustee and which was mentioned in the review but our two visitors were there to talk about the review, yet they did not ask about a scheme into which the Government have poured millions of pounds which, as far as I can see, has made little if any tangible difference to Care Leavers well-being in the last five years. For me it has been a wasted opportunity but the review – perhaps heeding Mr Zahawi’s endorsement (op.cit) appear to have exercised no scrutiny whatsoever.

Staying Close and Staying Put.

Obviously as a member of the Every Child Leaving Care Matters campaign (<https://eclcm.org/>) I must declare an interest here. That same interest that I shared in personal discussions with Mr MacAlister and colleagues in personal meetings and forums during the review. For any who do not know when Staying Put was introduced for care leavers several years ago it was based on the premise that 18 is

far too young an age for care leavers to be forced to live independently³. The average ages for men and women not in care to leave home is between 25 and 27 – with women tending toward the lower age. As such Staying Put created the option for care leavers to remain in their placement until they are 21 years of age. Great. But actually it was not open to all care leavers. Those in residential care must leave at 18. The reality is that many leave care at an earlier stage than this. Self-evidently the premise mentioned above, and the decision are irreconcilable and incongruous. The ECLCM campaign has existed since 2013 and it merely seeks equality of opportunity for all care leavers. In his review of Residential Care in England Sir Martin Narey consulted with ECLCM on this issue and we had a series of meetings. I believe (but obviously I could be wrong) that he had a great deal of sympathy with our cause and extensive arguments but ultimately asked if we could suggest an alternative because he felt any recommendation to recommend Staying put for all would fall on Mr Cameron's 'deaf ears'. We suggested (and I was personally present in all of the meetings and co-author of) 'Staying Close' based on a number of factors we described as Caring Teams⁴. This was not an alternative to Staying Put but something we said that could be introduced as an interim step to making Staying Put available to all. We told Sir Martin and he respected our view that our campaign would continue, and it has. In our many discussions with Mr MacAlister, the DfE (over the course of approximately 9 years), politicians at Local and Parliamentary levels we have never been faced with an argument that we could not defeat in suggesting that the only reason care leavers from the residential sector are not afforded the option to Stay Put is finance. This is not care this is discrimination by the Government. Yet Staying Put for residential care leavers does not merit a mention in the review. How can this be? This was launched as the biggest review of child care, a once in a generation review and other hyperbolic terms yet children of 17 in residential care who would wish to, but cannot, remain living 'at home' don't even merit a sentence. Perhaps this relates to the tone of the review in which residential care is generally conspicuous by its absence, but I will return to that later. We are used to be side-stepped, swerved and avoided by Government and its employees this is just one more example, but the fight goes on.

It could be, of course, that they will say that the proposed expansion of Staying Close to 23 addresses the issue. From an ECLCM perspective there are a few things that we would say on or ask about this:

- Of course for those who have benefitted from Staying Close (how many?) we are pleased that the offer is to be extended if Govt chooses to accept the recommendation.
- Of course the recommendation that it be extended to 23 is simply further confirmation that residential care leavers can access only a lower tier, lower support, less loving service. (presumably Staying Close placements will be registered, if at all, as supported living – where care and therefore 'love' cannot be offered or develop.
- We were saddened that following Sir Martin Narey recommending that we (ECLCM) should be invited to participate in the creation and design of Staying Close models that we were for a time and then dropped – perhaps it was

³ In reality there are regulations that allow young adults over the age of 18 to remain in placement beyond 18 but only if those in the placement over 18 are a smaller number than others in the placement under 18 – often referred to by Ofsted as "wholly and mainly".

⁴ Caring Teams is shown in Appendix 1.

something we said? At a recent webinar on the subject my questions were ignored, and I was told that they could not be addressed because they related to Staying Put and I should write to the DfE. Great way to shut down someone asking awkward questions that.

- Staying Close has essentially been an unregulated service and one presumes that it will remain so unless I have missed something?
- If, as it continually states, this review is all about “love”, “relationship building” and “sustaining” where does that leave residential care leavers who have built and sustained loving relationships with members of staff in their children’s home but who must leave at 18?
- How about those children and, albeit apocryphal evidence, (though a research programme could confirm or dispel this had the review commissioned one) who finally find a placement in a children’s home late in their ‘care career’ where they finally feel safe and settled who are nonetheless evicted for no other reason than their age when, had they finally settled in a foster placement, they would (in principle at least) have had the opportunity to remain. If someone can explain to me how this is not discrimination then please do.
- Nonetheless the Staying Close Pilots are to be extended.
- What research did the review rely on to support Staying Close. How many children from RCC ‘graduated into Staying Close? How many sustained this ‘placement’ and for how long? How many secured safe and sustainable housing and employment, education or training at the end of their placement. How many, if any, fostered children have been placed in the available Staying Close placements? In essence, where is the hard evidence. At the same time how many children left residential care and became homeless, entered the penal system, were admitted to long term or intermittent mental health care. Where lost to the system – whereabouts unknown. Where is the evidence? On what basis, therefore, has the Care Review endorsed Staying Close and how can it with any conscience fail to even mention the discriminatory nature of Staying Put.

Fostering

In the case of most, not all children, coming into care I agree that the first placement option, if viable, will be for them to live with a close relative as such I wholeheartedly agree with the recommendation that “*All local authorities should make a financial allowance paid at the same rate as their fostering allowance available for special guardians and kinship carers with a Child Arrangement Order looking after children who would otherwise be in care.*” Alternatively, if there are no suitable relatives to offer the child a safe and secure home again, in principle, I agree that a placement withing a loving and secure foster home should be sought for the child. There are caveats though. Whether at home whilst still living with their parent(s) or in an initial placement in a foster home an assessment of the child’s needs should be made. Children are complex little individuals and meeting their needs is a difficult and complicated task. If they are to come into care then they will have an attachment issue – merely being separated from their parents creates this. Some social workers seem to fail to understand this. I have ongoing contact with children in such situations and whilst not reaching for a generalist in on this my evidence is that

assessment skills in most of the social workers that I have come across are limited either by their skills and knowledge or perhaps their time. In almost every case they will have suffered some form of abuse or neglect. They may well have difficulties in forming relationships – perhaps with their new found carers. Their education may well have suffered, and they may feel isolated in school – if they actually go to school. They may have experienced severe trauma, witnessed domestic abuse. Possibly they will feel, but not recognise stigmatisation. They are complex little (or not so little if the local authorities have previously missed these children in need). They may not be ready for a family. These may be the children who would benefit from a period of stabilisation in a caring, loving, therapeutically and trauma-informed children's home. But no, they will go to a foster home because that's what we do that is what almost always happen – unless they are one of the 2% of children who enter care due to anti-social and or criminal behaviour. Just 2%.

But the review recognises that there is a massive shortage of foster carers in this country. It also proposes some solutions. Frankly they are ludicrous. The first based on a very small sample taken of teachers polled to ask if they might be willing to foster a child. Children can and do have great relationships with their teachers. Many children, many children in care cite a teacher as being one of their inspirations in life. To conflate the role of teacher and carer is a dangerous assumption. In reality we have many thousands of teachers in the country; some, I know are also foster carers. I have spoken personally with many such individuals and couples who for a range of good reasons decided that they would like to foster. Many, when asked have stated that they would not foster a child in their school because of the complexities that this would involve for both teacher and pupil/child. One did foster a child in their own school and very successfully too. The key issue is that they were all interested enough in fostering to apply to become foster carers and go through the, necessarily rigorous, process involved. Now I accept that my 'poll' over the forty plus years that I have worked in or with fostering teams may well be smaller than that cited in the review but there is a basis upon which I can extrapolate. All teachers around the country are likely to know that there is a need for more foster carers. Even if it's not something they have read about or seen in the media they interact with Children's Services regularly in respect of children in care and or in children in need and must surely understand from their social work partners that we need more foster carers. Some will respond to that challenge by applying to foster and this is fantastic the rest presumably don't feel that it is right for them before or regardless of making an enquiry of their LA or and IFA. How is it imagined that, despite this, there are hundreds or perhaps thousands of teachers who will, having read the review or in some other way had a 'Damascian' revelation and decide to apply to foster a child? If not teachers then will the presumed influx of foster carers come from the *"200,000 people (who) came forward to offer their homes to strangers fleeing war in Ukraine, (that) demonstrates the best of this country"*. This is indeed a strange analogy for the Care Review to create. Yes, when a country was being invaded and destroyed, their citizens murdered by a despotic dictator, children and babies being raped by monstrous military personnel, people were moved to offer a temporary home to refugees. Is this the same as fostering? The checks made on these good hearted people were minimal, the training non-existent, the support minimal and this may include some of the causes of the considerable number of 'breakdowns' that have occurred in the early months of the scheme. Yes, it did show the best of this

country. The will was there to help but the reality is somewhat different. But 'No' it bears little relationship to fostering.

The Mockingbird model of fostering is highly commended in the review. Perhaps justifiably so. It is by no means new, but it undoubtedly has value when sufficiently resourced and supported. Nonetheless, for the review to rely on "**Mockingbird's own evaluation**⁵ (which) *suggests a range of positive outcomes including increased placement stability, increased rates of foster carer recruitment and retention and significant cost savings for the care system*" seems a little weak and lacking in external evaluation and confirmation. The cottage homes system which was highly evidenced post war was not dissimilar perhaps if evaluations had been 'a thing' then they, too, might have pointed to many positives. Certainly they were cheap to operate, certainly there was a certain internal community, perhaps even a (contemporary definition) sense of family. They were of course unregulated so we will never be certain if they were 'good' or 'bad' for children (effectively) in care. Whilst the model, laudably, creates a "village to raise a child" there may be some who say that it also brings a sense of institutionalisation. Nevertheless the general principles are good and the recommendation to create an uplift fund of £80 million over the next five years to improve foster care support is to be welcomed provided that the money is well spent and leaves permanent improvements. I am old enough to have written (successful) bids for 'Quality Protects' funding in my own LA as did others in all parts of the country. Sadly, unless my memory fails me it was wonderful whilst it lasted but poor management or some other reason meant that in many cases improvements were transitory and when the funding ran out so did many of the improvements. A similar story relates to the Community Care Act in the early 1990's when LAs suddenly flushed with money offered expansive services to vulnerable adults, raising expectations and the quality of life in the first years when funds were committed as if it were 'Monopoly' money being spent only for massive shrinkage to occur after the first year and services grinding to a halt. Catchy phrases sound great but in and of themselves do nothing. I fear that the review's statement *The goal of our reform programme – Relationships Protect - is to leave a legacy of a self improving system, within which actors have high levels of freedom and responsibility. We propose six principles of reform, which are the building blocks that flow throughout the report and are set out in more detail in Chapter Nine.* Whilst the building blocks will not, I assume, be utilised in creating a Jenga tower there is a certain resonance here.

Residential care.

Did I miss something? The focus on residential care in the review seems to be almost entirely negative. It is clear from the words of Duncan Dunlop (Expert Advisor to the Review) after the publication of the review that he, at least, sees and wants no future for residential care, "*A vision for a healthy care system is one that plans for the end of residential care*". At least he's honest. The review states, "*There are many*

⁵ My emboldening.

children living in children's homes today who would be better suited to living in a family environment with a foster carer if we had enough foster carers in the right places, with the right parenting skills to meet the varying and complex needs of children". Based on what exactly? I could say that there are many fostering breakdowns because the child's needs were too complex at the time of placement to settle into a family environment that (s)he didn't want/need to be in, but we continue to place children in multiple foster homes before a children's home placement is sought. Obviously as someone who has managed children's homes and children's homes services for over 30 years I may have an unbalanced view of their value for some children at some times. Others have written far more eloquently and persuasively than I on the value of residential care. Jonathan Stanley (Partner at the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care⁶), for example and I invite anyone reading this to check out the NCERCC website for a range of information and articles on the subject. I particularly suggest this piece if time is short <https://ncercc.co.uk/ncercc-calls-for-research-into-rightsizing-residential-child-care-to-avoid-existential-threat-to-one-third-of-homes/> . Unlike Mr Dunlop I do not see residential care as a bad thing. In 30 years of working in the sector and ten years campaigning for ECLCM I have come across perhaps thousands of children who have passed through children's homes. Many will say they got to a children's home too late and left too soon. Most will say that, as Sir Martin Narey wrote in his *'Residential Homes in England' 2016*⁷ the average length of stay in Children's Homes is 6-7 months. Why is this? In large part because a children's home was a 'last resort' placement at the end of a child's time 'physically in care' before being discarded to, well wherever. The 'Destination Unknown'⁸ lays out the horrific nature of the way in which we treat many of our residential care leavers and like Mr MacAlister I will offer two stories taken from the CDSG report – these can be found in Appendix 2. Craig and Rory's stories are not unusual but typical.

The review considers that if children's homes have a place in the care system then it is a very limited one. I disagree entirely. It raises the old chestnut of children's homes being selective in accepting children to live with them because they are 'easy'. Not so. A children's home rightly works to a statement of purpose in which they must explain their level of expertise to accommodate and enable children to thrive – and many do before leaving care to independence, returning home or moving into foster care. Children's homes cannot simply accept any child. They are not like a multi-storey car park that has several levels for vehicles of different sizes to park, they're homes often family homes complete with argument, love, problems, resolutions they are not and cannot be 'one size fits all'. The refusal to take a placement is not about Ofsted grades directly. Certainly if a home took a child out with its statement of purpose Ofsted would react minimally with a very bad inspection report but quite possibly with a closure notice.

I agree, however, on the criticism of the appalling profits made by some of the larger companies involved in the ownership of tens of homes. How has this occurred well,

⁶ In the interest of transparency I should state that I am an Associate of NCERCC. This is an unpaid role and I receive no material benefit as an Associate.

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https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/534560/Residential-Care-in-England-Sir-Martin-Narey-July-2016.pdf

⁸ <http://www.csdg.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/WA-CSDG-Children-Services-Report-SPREADS.pdf>

it's obvious and has been predictable within the sector for many years. Briefly, in the 70's and 80's as LA homes began to fail, and third sector homes were rocked by scandals of institutional abuse there was a growth in the independent ownership of homes. There were few, if any, partnership arrangements with LAs on commissioning. Larger companies began to open multiple homes and their profits increased if nothing else by economies of scale and ability to 'manipulate LA tenders and approved provider lists. They began to dominate the market and squeeze smaller companies many of whom sold to the larger companies which made them bigger still and attractive to venture capitalists. Here we are. Should they pay a windfall tax as suggested in the review? Why not? However, a better mechanism in my opinion that this one 'big hit' would be to establish, by negotiation if necessary, an acceptable level of profit. Now some will say this is making profit on the back of children in care and it is. It's a matter of what that profit goes to and is it reasonable. If it leads to constant improvement in services, better quality of care then what's wrong with profit if it pays staff and for those improvements. I have been an LA employee and I got paid for protecting children which sometimes involved them coming into care. I bought a nice house with my pay. Was I making profit on the back of vulnerable children? Did the LA levy rates and then council tax to improve our local services? No-one has accused me of this and if they did I'd simply say I do a job that I love, try very hard to make a difference and I stick with it. When I worked running a small company delivering residential, fostering and education I was actually getting less pay than my former colleagues in the LA (when taking pension and service conditions into account) but I loved what I was doing developing good and Outstanding placements. We had a profit target of 6% and often missed it. When we hit it the owner of the company who had established it got a dividend. That seems fair as he had taken the risk. He could have got a similar or larger return by investing his money. The 'wise and the good' from the Independent sector and public sector could surely reach an agreement on what a reasonable level of return could be. Anything above that (and accounts would be thoroughly audited) would be placed in a Care Bank for the benefit of all children in care and care leavers. This is a simplistic rendering of an argument proposed by brighter people than I such as Jonathan Stanley and Kathy Evans of Children England and is included here merely as a marker not a detailed argument for the case.

One of the most concerning developments in recent years has been the growth of unregulated homes. Establishments taking in always vulnerable, often the most vulnerable of teenagers. This is not a new concept – it has happened for years with teenagers – often as young as 14 or 15 being placed in establishments entirely unsuited to meet their needs or keep them safe. What they do is offer somewhere for a child to live (even if many of the children placed are frequently missing) when there are no regulated and registered homes available. The growth in this sector has been chronicled by the BBC and other news media. I now say openly for the first time that I assisted the media in exposing some of these practices and I have expressed my own views previously and regularly including a piece in 'Community Care in 2019. <https://www.communitycare.co.uk/2019/08/12/childrens-homes-regulated-keep-children-safe/>

These places have grown because of the shortage of registered children's homes in the right place, at the right time and able to meet children's needs whatever they may be. Some charge outrageous prices knowing that the LA has no alternative.

Children have been exploited and harmed in these establishments. Government response has not been to take a lead and sit down with LAs and providers to broker a solution but to offer a 'back door' to registration with a lower set of standards than is in place for children's homes. They decided that a whole cohort of the most vulnerable children can be accommodated in homes where "care" not only can't but must not be offered. Whilst the Review seems to suggest that all children should receive care wherever they are placed they chose not to support the #Keeponcareingto18 campaign mobilised by the charity Article 39 - <https://article39.org.uk/keepcaringforchildrenupto18/> . Had they done so then instead of legislation being passed that denies children over 16 the right to 'care' which would now have to be overturned it could have prevented the legislation from entering statute. At best this is allowing countless children to be exposed to risk. In an interim period and at worst, indefinitely.

Simply on Care

The review calls for, "*New and ambitious care standards, applicable across all homes for children, should be introduced*". This presumably would include residential, foster, kinship placements – perhaps even the supported living placements (as they are now known which must not provide care at all, but which albeit a little ambiguously insists will provide care. How might these be developed? Currently residential care is the only setting in which children live where they should be cared for in accordance with Quality Standards; fostering, on the other hand works to National Minimum standards. Will the new standards be 'Quality' or 'Minimum'? In the absence of Reviewing Officers and Regulation 44 Visitors who will be regularly and in the best case granularly ensuring that children are being cared for in accordance with the standards in between Ofsted visits? Will Ofsted start visiting every foster family in a Local Authority or Independent Fostering Agency inspection or perhaps just a sample of homes where a provider has more than one home? Considering the differences between the residential and fostering experience, the 'parent(s)/staff, building /house, fellow residents/foster brothers or sisters will the standards be a drop down list where one selects the appropriate standard for the particular setting. Will the delegated authority on day to day decisions be vested in the Registered Manager of a children's home – or perhaps the child's key worker as the review suggests (and I happen to agree) should be given to foster carers, "*However, delegated authority to foster carers for day to day decisions like hair cuts, sleepovers and dental appointments should be provided by default, and withheld by exception*". Should the regulations reinforce the discrimination around Staying Put? Perhaps I have missed what I was hoping to be included in the review - an implicit recommendation that all children in care should be given the same opportunities to remain in their placement (their home, with their 'family) until they are 21 – or maybe even 23? I fear not. The review states that there should be common regulations for all settings but gives no clue as to what they should contain. I've no idea why – it is very detailed, for example when describing in fine detail how Family Help should look, what it should do and how it should do it but on care it seems to leave the application of its recommendation to those who, one presumes it disagrees with (otherwise why suggest change?) to re-imagine. Care is not a 'one size fits all' experience.

There is another recommendation that: *“Local authorities should redesign their existing Independent Visitors scheme for children in care and care leavers to allow for long term relationships to be built”*. Did the review examine the number of children in residential or foster care who actually have an Independent Visitor? My experience is that it is a tiny minority. Perhaps the recommendation should be that first the local authorities should ensure that all children should have access to an Independent Visitor. If, however, this had been the case then perhaps the review should have addressed how the relationship between the IV and the child’s Advocate should be managed.

It’s hard to disagree with a recommendation that seeks to increase the ownership of corporate parenting *“New legislation should be passed which broadens corporate parenting responsibilities across a wider set of public bodies and organisations”*. However, the fact is that whatever bodies the review considers that this recommendation should be aimed at, they are already ‘corporate parents’ if they are public bodies. Perhaps it is suggesting penalties for those who do not accept this responsibility rather than identifying them. The fact is that legislating for this is already in place – it’s compliance which is the problem. How is compliance to be measured and how enforced. If someone is made to ‘care’ for a child, to give them opportunities to thrive then my suggestion is that as now they simply won’t. You can’t legislate for this it’s about getting our politicians who show minimal interest in children in care to take their responsibility as corporate parents and act accordingly. We need a sea change the size of a tsunami to achieve this and without it this recommendation is simply a set of hollow words with no meaning. Has Mr MacAlister had conversations with Mr Johnson about the review? Certainly, if he has then I missed the bold Boris talking about it. I have already pointed to the contrast between the English and Scottish leaders in respect of ownership of their respective ‘care reviews’. Such is the importance of the English Review – only promised in a forced election promise - that the Government and its members have remained largely silent. Mr Zahawi, the responsible minister presided over the early stages of the exponential growth of unregulated homes and did nothing. The Government was happy to use Statutory Instruments to make damaging changes to the lives of children in care, to then ‘magic’ unregulated homes into registered homes. I hope but don’t expect that Mr MacAlister was involved in white hot arguments with ministers about how badly they treat children in care. Clearly they weren’t reported if they ever happened. I see no evidence that children entering, already in and leaving care will lead better lives as a consequence of this review.

Expert Child Protection Practitioners

There is a strong argument that anyone working on cases where safeguarding **might** become an issue – are there any in children’s social care where this is not the case? If this is so then should not all social workers working in whatever team be experts on child protection – it’s at the heart of children’s social work after all. Co-working can pay dividends but rarely from the child’s perspective as it is yet another professional that they have to get to know when, if safeguarding is an issue there will already be schools, their own social worker, health personnel and likely the police at least all becoming involved. We need to move away from changes of social worker wherever possible if the aspiration of the review of relationship based practice is to prevail. There is already a tendency to have multiple different social workers involved

as the child moves through stages of 'investigation' to 'family support' (as I assume it may be) to 'looked after' teams and adding another to the mix seems senseless. Surely the consistency of one worker staying with the child and his/her family through the 'system' makes more sense. I have recently worked with a family where the child has had seven social workers (including but counting only as 1, 2 sets of co-workers) in the course of 23 months of court proceedings as a result of domestic violence— it is little wonder that the (very bright) ten year old – who remains in his mum's care is now refusing to see any social worker. Because the case has reached the family court he has seen a total of 31 professionals to date. To structurally plan for another worker to be introduced in cases seems like madness to me. Social workers in assessment teams must have expertise in child protection and safeguarding if they have not then it is training and induction that should be addressed as being problematic. By all means ensure that first line managers and if necessary Senior Practitioners, both of whom should be experts in child protection, are available for consultation in the most complicated or difficult of cases but for pity's sake do not ask a child to get to know and have a relationship with another visitor to her/his home. This case may also be of interest to those reading it in terms of Family Help. Despite very firm evidence (but as, so often no prosecution to date, of the father) the LA, supported by the Cafcass Guardian (2 of them actually) who has met the mother once, the ten year old boy once and the two year old boy not at all) is seeking care proceedings on the grounds that the mother is alienating the children's father. The ten year old has described his abuse to 2 police officers, 3 social workers, 1 counsellor from a 'Women's Aid' charity yet there has been no Section 47 report.

The trouble with experts is that they are in high demand. Experts in Child Protection are not often also experts in family Support and experts in looked after children. So it becomes structurally impossible for lasting and sustained relationships to be developed between children and their social worker. Most Local Authorities are organised that so that as children pass through various stages of a care path they find themselves accompanied by a different social worker. This is something the review should have addressed but seems not to have done so.

In the section 'A just and decisive child protection system' the review describes the role clarity for various named professionals and "*There will be clearer expectations on multi-agency capabilities for child protection so that different professionals, including child protection paediatricians and specialist police officers, inform decisions*". Frankly, I cannot see how this differs from how good and effective safeguarding partnerships operate now. Is the implication that most SPs are not functioning effectively? If this is the case then so be it, but we seem to imagine if the suggestion of change is made that by re-imagining roles of the same agencies something miraculous will occur and improvements will follow. This does seem to be a little like "re-arranging the deckchairs on the 'Titanic'".

You can't legislate for love. People enter children's social care and all it's different settings for the right reasons – generally. Social workers, foster carers, children's home staff, relatives who care for an extended family child enter the various services for the best of reasons. They care. Some become tired of beating their heads against a series of proverbial walls. The review appears to have ignored the fact that the rate of social workers leaving the profession is alarming. Residential carers generally

paid little above minimum wage cannot afford to remain in this low paid job which demands so much of their heart and soul. This is not because of exploitative owners creaming off every last penny of profit in children's homes but because our society regards it as a low paid job. That seems to be how we value care across all sectors.

The review seems to be of the opinion that it has discovered the concept of relationship based work. For the best of social workers, foster carers and residential children's care staff this is what has gone on for years. There is love there and there always has been but sometimes love is challenged by the pressure of too many demands being placed on workers. Too much administration, too many targets, too much bureaucratic gobbledegook to negotiate, too many key performance indicators – none of these can measure love. The review, at times, seems to imagine that it has coined the notion of love between children in care and their carers. I'll let you into a secret, it's been there for years.

Appendix 1

The key elements required to comply with the ECLCM vision of an acceptable

STAYING CLOSE placement

“Caring Teams”

ECLCM believe that for a Staying Close placement to have a realistic chance of being successful and to mirror as far as is possible the security and support offered by a good Staying Put placement, there are 11 key areas that have to be addressed.

These may be remembered by the use of the acronym “Caring Teams”. The acronym represents:

Centrality of the young person - Each young person’s plans must be individual, bespoke to that young person and addressing their specific needs, wishes and aspirations. They should not be part of a ‘one size fits all’ template.

Age to 21 – The placement should be able to offer the young person a supported home until s/he has attained at least the age of 21, and ideally longer as required.

Reviews and planning (Role of the IRO?) - It is vital if the Staying Close plan is to remain focused and to be implemented as planned for it to be reviewed. It is suggested that formal six monthly reviews might be held for the duration of the placement that are chaired by someone independent but recognised by each of the agencies, who would be responsible for interviewing the young person to seek their views before each review and producing a written report following each review. An Independent Reviewing Officer (IRO) is an obvious candidate to fulfil such a role.

Inspection - In order for the placement to be seen to be safe, appropriate and meeting the young person’s needs and agreed plans, it is vital that it should be inspected and monitored. The placement should be inspected at prior to admission and at least once annually by Ofsted or an agreed inspection agency to ensure it meets agreed standards. It might then be monitored at monthly intervals via “Regulation 44” visits that would feed into Ofsted and advise the provider, young person and Ofsted of their findings.

Near enough to the children’s home to walk there in 15 minutes in an emergency at any time of the day or night or merely to facilitate regular and on-going contact as agreed in their care planning. This is consistent with the principle of “Staying Close” and mirrors the accessibility of carers in “Staying Put”.

Government funded to ensure that the availability of Staying Close is not a post code lottery and that funding is provided to meet the agreed plans and the young person’s assessed needs, and not be totally dependent upon benefit levels or any other form of financial support from other agencies.

Team around the child – The placement must be supported by a multi-agency team representing the support in place as part of the Staying Close plan. – Social work, Housing, Health, Employment/Education, Residential provider, etc. Care planning decisions should be made by this team and the young person

Early planning towards independent living – It is not sufficient or appropriate to offer training or teach young people independent living skills when they reach the age of 16 years old. This must not be left until young people enter in to a Staying close plan. Training towards independent living should be offered according to age, understanding and ability from the day a child is first admitted into care, and where possible, they should have these basic skills prior to their “Staying Close” placement.

Accountability of each party - Each and all of the agencies or individuals comprising the ‘team around the child should have clearly outlined areas of

responsibility and tasks included in the care plan, for which they will be accountable and held to review

Maintains the relationships formed between the young person and the residential team with whom they have been living. The placement and care planning, protects and promotes the maintenance and development of relationships significant to the young person – perhaps the key worker (or other member(s) of the residential team), a youth worker, teacher, social worker or other identified person

Staying Close - A clear definition of what constitutes 'Close' agreed in each individual case. The principle behind staying Close is that a young person might 'Stay Close' to the residential home that they lived in prior to their being discharged from care at 18 years of age or before. Staying Close should mean exactly that, not that a young person is decanted at 18 into a house retained in an area for the purpose with a group of other young people in similar situations and visited occasionally – Supported lodgings with visits. The appropriate Staying Close placement should be agreed as appropriate and suitable with the young people and the team in each individual case. This would mirror the spirit of Staying Put as introduced for young people who were being discharged from foster care.

Appendix 2

CRAIG'S STORY	RORY'S STORY
<p>Craig was a young person who had been in care and education for five years, living in an affluent village in the North West of England. He decided to leave school at the age of 16 to start working for a construction company.</p> <p>When Craig turned 18, and he was due to leave the children's home, the local authority only offered to provide him with a bedsit located in an undesirable town which was far from where he grew up and from where his children's home had been. This would have meant leaving his current job and starting his adult life again from scratch.</p> <p>CSDG's member, who operated his provision, refused to let this happen. Determined to ensure that he lived nearby to his employer, they put down a deposit for him on a nearby flat and acted as a reference for him. His employer also increased his salary to make living more affordable. This meant that the local authority didn't need to contribute any more funding towards his living costs and meant that Craig was able to carry on in his employment and secure a positive transition into adulthood. This was a positive outcome for Craig, but was only achieved thanks to the intervention of his former care provider and his employer.</p>	<p>Rory was a young person who had been in specialist care and education for five years. When he became 16, he moved to a mainstream sixth form college to continue his studies, but remained in the children's home. His former school stayed in close contact to make sure he was doing well in his new college.</p> <p>However, on his 18th birthday, the local authority pulled their funding for his children's home placement, causing significant disruption to his studies. The CSDG member that operated the children's home and his former school supported him by renting a flat at their expense.</p> <p>Whilst living in the flat, his father was released from prison and re-entered his son's life. This had a big impact on Rory, and soon afterwards his behaviour started to deteriorate as he no longer had the full support of the care environment he needed. If the local authority had continued to fund his placement until after he had finished studying, Rory would have been safeguarded against the detrimental influence of his father and would most likely have gone to university.</p>