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# Message from the Co-Chairs

We always seem to be saying that we live in testing times.

Indeed on many occasions whether as individuals, individual organisations or as ICHA we feel to be reacting to other people's agendas and fighting a rearguard action on issues.

However ICHA is gradually taking a more proactive and pre-emptive approach. Indeed it is our view that we need to be much more vigorous in promoting the professional voice of quality residential child care and illustrating how our members do this. We need to use old and new research, members' experiences and our national contacts to bring to life the reality of what is happening to children. We must tell the story from their point of view and engage politicians in

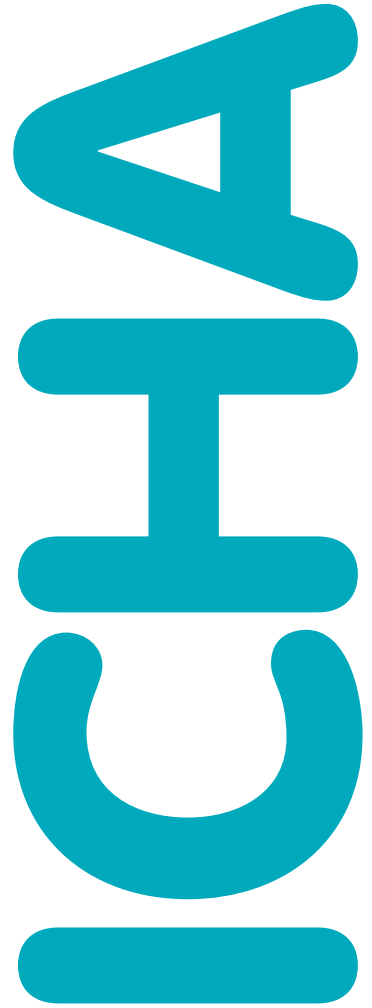
children's real lives and not just popular mythology or political rhetoric.

It is said that there are 3 kinds of people in this world: those who make things happen, those who watch things happen, those who wonder what the hell did happen.

More and more we must "make things happen" in promoting the association of high quality care with ICHA activities and our members' work. We need to continue to step up our influence at a national level and have your voice heard loud and clear through ICHA.

Hopefully this newsletter illustrates how we are increasingly going about this on your behalf.

**Steve Lord & Jim Sullivan**



# An Exceptional Year for ICHA

The message from Co-Chairs Steve Lord and Jim Sullivan is that ICHA needs to continue to make sure that the voices of our member's are heard. As an organisation, we have certainly worked hard to achieve that in 2011.

Membership is the highest it has ever been and attendance at meetings has increased significantly in recent months. Contributions from newer members as well as those who have been involved in the sector for many years combine to give ICHA the experience and knowledge with which we try to influence the decision-makers; both at a Local Authority and a Parliamentary level.

The introduction of Jonathan Stanley as ICHA's Policy and Practice consultant has created even closer links with many other bodies within the sector including the DfE; and of course Jonathan has brought access to an abundance of research projects, past and

present, that will inform us in our ambition to continually raise the quality of care we offer to young people. You will no doubt have read Jonathan's article in the last Newsletter about the ICHA visit to Denmark to look at the Social Pedagogic model there.

In Gary Kent's article in this edition of the Newsletter you will read about a recent visit to ICHA homes by members of the Education Select Committee. Thanks to Gary's work in Parliament on our behalf we were able to offer this invite to this powerful group of MPs. In addition, we have invited all MPs with ICHA members in their constituency to visit our homes and see for themselves the work that we do. Some have already taken us up on this offer.

In the ICHA office we are busy collating the information for the 2012 Commissioners handbook. As one member put it 'I have

regular referrals come to us via the Handbook' so please make sure that all of your information is updated for the new edition that we will as usual be sending to Commissioners in England and Wales.

Finally, we will be setting a date for the ICHA AGM in January and will notify members through the usual channels. Many thanks go to our members for your continued support of ICHA throughout 2011 and we hope to see many of you at our meetings in 2012!

**Roy Williamson**  
Executive Officer  
ICHA

# "We need an assessment..."

Children and young people referred for specialist residential placement invariably present with highly complex needs. Research has found that, whilst the prevalence of mental health difficulties in the general population is around 10%, amongst young people in care placements in England it is much higher, almost 70% for those in residential care. In placement, 70-80% of children are likely to need specialist emotional or behavioural support, particularly amongst young people in residential settings.

Referrals to residential facilities are often made in a context of crisis, such as through the unplanned breakdown of the latest placement. Care providers report that they are given promises that information, including assessments, will follow after the child is accepted for the placement, yet it often fails to turn up. Of the assessments that are made available, many are out of date and can be difficult to interpret in terms of the current presentation and need.

Why are so many young people with such obviously multiple and complex needs failing to be assessed prior to (or during) specialist placements? There seem to be several reasons, including the difficulties of access to appropriately qualified and experienced professionals (including from CAMHS) poor inter-agency communication and possibly an acceptance by workers of a young person's challenging and unusual behaviours as being largely a product of their adverse life experiences. Stigma about being a user of mental health services can also get in the way.

## Why Assess?

What are the advantages for the care provider of initiating a psychological or mental health assessment? On the one hand, an assessment should aim to describe a young person's difficulties and link them to what is known about effective treatment, but also provides a basis for the team of workers involved in the young person's care to be able to communicate effectively and meet needs more sensitively and appropriately. Social care and health commissioners quite rightly have a focus both on getting value for money and on pressing providers to spell out what they think they can achieve in terms of outcomes for the young person. Specifying what you think can be done without considering the particular difficulties and needs of a young person coming into a treatment programme is a hazardous path, particularly with young people whose experiences are far from typical.

Whilst more and more is being learned about the long-term consequences that experience of both early child abuse and neglect and also the effects of being in care (such as living with strangers, multiple placement, placement breakdowns etc.) exert on the developing child, carers and professional networks can find it very hard to hold onto these knowledges and use them to guide action. This is particularly so when the measurement of the placement is based on universal outcome models such

as Every Child Matters. The optimism that 'something can still be done' is important for all parties, but such optimism risks placing an overwhelming burden onto both carers and the young person if expectations are set unrealistically.

## What constitutes "a good assessment"?

An important starting point is for the assessment to have practical meaning and application for everyone involved. The findings and recommendations should guide care practice as well as specifying resources or approaches which are likely to help secure progress. Look for a holistic assessment which considers the young person in the context of all aspects of their development and day-to-day living, including education and vocational needs, their family and early experiences, peer relationships as well as mental health, emotional and intellectual functioning. The importance of the person's care career should be given a rich consideration by the assessor, particularly in terms of which placement experiences or relationships have been held onto by the young person in the developing story of their life.

## How useful are labels?

If the assessment concludes with a diagnosis or clinical description of some kind, it is reasonable to expect that you will get some suggestions about the implications of this for your care practice. At the same time though, it's not uncommon for traumatised young people to present with various behaviours without showing the full-blown description for any particular condition. The assessment should spell out that this doesn't mean there aren't problems needing to be addressed, and that the impairments arising from having a range of difficulties is much more challenging to live with.

For example, a common debate seems to be whether a young person's presentation is indicative of trauma/attachment problems or an organic/neurodevelopmental disorder such as autism. Emotion management difficulties, social deficits, intense anxiety about change, sensory problems and obsessional behaviour can get an assessor very excited. However this pattern of disturbance of social and emotional behaviour, whilst often seen in the care population, has not yet been formally investigated. For this population a 'both/and' perspective is more facilitative than an 'either/or' one, and advice about management should take this into account.

## Aren't some young people just very resilient?

What makes a person able to cope with adversity is something that is attracting quite a lot of interest at the moment, and you might have accepted a young person who seems to have coped very well with what life has thrown at them so far. But there may be another story.

The young people who hide their emotional distress, who have seemed "to be alright" despite everything that's happened to them, are much more likely not to be seen as in need of help. Assessment for every young person in placement is essential if you're placement is to address all the ways that trauma and psychopathology present.

## Giving Best Value

A specialist mental health/psychological evaluation will strive to identify the effects of what has happened, how it affects current functioning and what can be done to help. The findings should identify how the resources available within the placement might be deployed and what else might be needed. It should also recommend alternatives if there is evidence they are likely to improve outcome. Crucially, assessments can inform staff training and staff supports such as consultancy and supervision. Better supported staff helps placement retention and outcomes. Assessments also establish a baseline for evaluating progress and reviewing the young person's future needs. Above all, they help placing authorities to demonstrate their decisions are well considered and as such can contribute to placement stability. Given the nomadic nature of this population, this is no small thing.

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# Financial constraints and training: A way forward?

## Introduction

We are all under increasing financial pressure, and when it comes to saving money training can be seen as an easy target. There are perhaps a number of ways to spend less on training, we might cut the amount of training, just do mandatory training, do it all in house, make workers pay for their own, recruit trained workers, buy cheaper training or spend more time chasing funding. Any of these tactics may help the cash flow and the bottom line but we need to be aware of the impact it has on business in both the short and long term.

Although the Government is squeezing us all they continue to suggest increasing levels of training for our workforce in order for us to be able to better compete on the world stage. In Ofsted's recent report "Outstanding children's homes 2011" one of the key characteristics is that "the passion and energy of staff who are deeply committed to their work, and the recruitment, training and management systems which identify these staff and support them to grow and develop." The report goes on to make further observations, "staff are the life-blood of a successful children's home", "both induction and continuing training are vital to building an effective staff team" and that "there was clear evidence that training was tailored not just to the needs and interests of the staff but also to the needs of the children". The overall tone of the report is that what makes outstanding children's homes is outstanding managers and outstanding staff. No surprises there really, but what make managers and staff outstanding. Clearly there are many personal qualities which are important but training and development are also vital.

I wanted to offer a few thoughts on training and development that might help employers and managers make good quality decisions.

With new less prescriptive National Minimum Standards and in the spirit of Munro's suggestions about being more child centered and less bureaucratic maybe it's time to revisit Training.

## Focus on learning, not training

Training suggests putting stuff into people, when actually we should be developing people from the inside out, so they achieve their own individual potential. Concentrating on what they love and enjoy, what they are most capable of, and strong at doing, rather than what we try to make them be. Training is about the organisation. Learning is about the person. Training is often a chore. Training is something that happens at work. People do it because they're paid to do it. Learning is quite different. Learning is something that people pursue by choice. People respond to appropriate learning because they want to, because it benefits and interests them, because it helps them to grow and to develop their natural abilities, to make a difference and to be special. Learning describes a person growing, whereas 'training' merely describes, and commonly represents, transfer of knowledge or skill for organisational gain, which often has little to do with the trainee. Give people more choice in what, and how and

when to learn and develop. There is a world of choice out there, and so many ways to access it all. People have different learning styles, rates of learning, and areas of interest. Why restrict people's learning and development to their job skills? Help them learn and develop in whatever way they want and they will quite naturally become more positive, productive and valuable to your organisation. Obviously we cannot ignore basic skills and knowledge training, but they are not what makes the difference. Bloom's taxonomy (2001) can provide a model to investigate these ideas further. So how can we use this thinking to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of our organisation.

## Get SMARTER

**S for Specific.** Be really clear about exactly what you want the training to do. If it is just about fact transfer maybe the e-learning route is sufficient or think about developing or commissioning a quality series of practice guidance notes to inform and give basic instructions. If it is more about attitudes, values and behaviour then a more experiential or discussion based session may be what is required. Delivering training courses often entails giving a wide range of information to a wide range of people and inevitably some people know it all and some don't keep up. Be specific about what you want. It's too easy to just book an off the shelf course to meet assumed need or to tick a box or satisfy our inspectors.

**M for Measurable.** Evaluate the learning experience. We pay a good deal of money for training and often fail to evaluate how useful and effective it is or isn't. Kirkpatrick's (1994) evaluation model gives us a tool to do this. He suggests we should spend time evaluating the reaction of student, what they thought and felt about the training, test their increase in knowledge, note their changes in behaviour and capacity and also measure the effects of training on the business. This isn't about a feedback sheet this is about spending quality supervision time with learners one to one or in groups measuring how good or bad training was.

**A for Agreed.** Be clear that this is what everyone wants and needs. If training is a precious commodity then we need to ask people what will make a difference to them. Again if they are learning they will be motivated. Find a training provider that understands exactly what you want and delivers the goods.

**R for Realistic.** Sometimes we look to training to solve problems. Sometimes this is realistic but maybe problems need to be tackled in other ways as well as training. If we are clear about what is going wrong or what needs to be better and think this through then maybe training isn't the first answer. Managers solve problems, so time spent training managers is always going to be effective. Managers are clearly made not born if we want better ones we should train them to be better.

**T for Time.** Getting training delivered at the right time. We are one of the few professions that allow our workers to start work without a qualification. Starting to work with little or no induction training seems to me to be an

outdated and potentially dangerous situation. Waiting for an annual training day to come round can be counterproductive. Maybe we should think more about providing pre-employment training, maybe we could group together to arrange this, maybe prospective employees pay for some of their own training prior to starting work. Would any of us visit a doctor or solicitor on their first day of work if they hadn't been trained? Again talking to training organisations to come up with innovative solutions and new ideas could be effective. They should also be knowledgeable about funding and grants that might assist with such ideas.

## E for Ethical, Enjoyable, Exciting and Experiential.

Use an ethical trainer. They may cost a little more but you will get the cost back in integrity. Make learning enjoyable, exciting and experiential. People remember having fun, they remember being challenged and taken outside their comfort zones, they remember having a go at something new. Experiential learning is about developing people as individuals, developing people's confidence, self-esteem, personal strengths, and crucially a rounded sense of purpose and fulfilment which fundamentally improve attitude, life-balance and emotional well-being. When people can be helped to discover that learning and development itself can be fun and emotionally rewarding, then we provide a platform for all sorts of learning and development in the future. Conversely, when we subject people to inappropriate teaching or training, which does not interest them or fit their preferred learning style, we put people off learning and development, sometimes permanently.

**R for Recorded.** Record your thoughts about the needs of the young people, the staff and the organisation and put them into a plan. Planning for a year ahead keeps everyone, including Ofsted, happy and you can probably negotiate a discount with your training provider for block booking.

## Summary

Training is vital and we need to think very carefully before we cut our training budgets. However whether we cut the budgets or not, there are a number of things we can do to increase the effectiveness of our training. Start focussing on learning rather than training. Put more time and effort into planning training and get smarter about commissioning and delivering training. Make learning fun, make it experiential and make it memorable. When you've done your training make sure you spend time evaluating it. If it is effective do more of it and if it is not effective do something different. Like the old saying goes, "if you do what you've always done you'll get what you've always got."

Any training provider that is worth using will help you with all these issues, if they don't they are probably not worth using.

## Colin Imrie

Director of Aquila Alternatives

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Consultancy training and development for the children's workforce

# Cash or care?

This is a significant moment for professional child care, whether we can go onwards developing enough'. There is a radical reshaping of the residential sector underway with neither theory nor

The cohesiveness of the residential child care sector over previous decades first was diminished by its reduction in use, its opportunities denied their value, its poorer outcomes ascribed directly to it alone, taken as the cause rather than the correlation of the sequential failures of social work and other social care interventions.

Today it is frequently described as a 'last resort' to which one has to ask the question – then what responsibility do you have for making it so and how could you change it?

It has been further diminished in numbers. When total numbers are rising the 2011 DfE statistics show 9% of Looked After Children are placed residentially. Knowing the historical number is between 10-13% that research tells us need a residential solution we can see this is an historical low.

Remember that these are not the same young people who are best placed in fostering settings, even those placed for Multi-Dimensional Treatment. These young people frequently have profound disability or serious psychological needs needing intensive social, emotional, and behavioural support. It is not to say we do not have something that can be learned from other interventions but that for some residential is the right place at the right time.

Responsibility must be placed where it is due. A smaller sector has potential for fragmentation with increasing rapidity brought about by neglect and omission of vision and strategy by procurers and local/national Government. It is a situation that must be brought to the attention of the Education Select Committee and their current enquiry into child protection (see Gary Kent column this issue).

Providers and young people are trying to respond positively, to make sense of happenings outside of their control but these conditions that are being imported from outside child care make it increasingly difficult for the sector to respond in the needs-led creative manner that is recognisable as the

English residential child care tradition. In clinical terms it would be said that the system is increasingly being made unable to provide psychological containment.

We are living through an age where evidence-based practice is an expectation. We have an extensive evidence and experience base stretching back over many decades that we can deploy. Too often it is only the provider organisations that are seeking to make fullest use of the evidence base. Outside of providers too frequently, if it is used at all, there is selective use of the evidence base. Often this partiality or omission is to bolster a position rather than see a strategy which would require a wider and deeper knowledge and application.

At its mildest frequently what is suggested is the replication of a skill with the expectation of an outcome. One can see how Cost Calculators are attractive if this is the view taken. But they are based on something that is antithetical to good child care, the economic disaggregation of the social whole. I can hear someone saying 'But it's not rocket science'. No it's more complex than that, and even if it were that simple then we would never have got to the Moon if we had left out some important elements. It is as complex as it needs to be. What is so easily omitted is the appreciation of the context, the knowledge, skills, practice, ethos, that make the skill meaningful and effective. It isn't the case we need to copy, to *comply*, but to seek to transfer *creatively* from one place to another.

**We know of no prior impact assessment regarding any changes taking place that might draw from the work of Ian Sinclair who reminds us of the high level knowledge base which blends research and practice-based evidence**

Views children, RCCWs, social workers, and parents

Other descriptive data

Statistical assessment of the impact of different factors on outcomes

Research studies using various inputs and none to evaluate effectiveness

Research overviews of literature including case material and other data

**But none of these by themselves are free from difficulty. 4 other considerations 'are very important':**

*Common probability* – how likely are the conclusions, working on the basis of

professional opinion, previous research and relevant theory?

*Calculated probability* – are the differences discussed large enough and the numbers great enough to make it very unlikely that they occur 'by chance'?

*Coherence* – how far do the different studies arrive at similar conclusions and how far do the different sources of evidence (e.g. children's views and statistical data) support each other?

*Consequences* – what are the practical risks of accepting a conclusion when it is wrong as against rejecting it when it is right?

Combined with the audits of need and provision that local authorities need to have completed by September we could be using the research summary collated by NCERCC to drive a coherent strategy making an impact assessment of the changes. This could be the foundation for the implementation of good practice. It is urgent that procurers/commissioners and Government now step forwards working with provider in partnership. To be clear we face a decision – is it to be Care or Cash that drives forwards the work? A social worker may opt for the best fit for needs, the 'most appropriate placement' is the priority under child care legislation, but have their choice overturned by management prioritising 'best value'.

There should be no blame placed upon the current incumbents of the positions in local or national Government. What we are now experiencing is the playing out of trends introduced in the 1980s when compulsory competitive tendering in local government introduced to the '3 E's' – economy, efficiency and effectiveness. By the beginning of the 21st Century, in the wake of the Gershon report (2004) these were replaced by the 4 Cs – challenge, comparison, consultation and competition.

What we need now is a new 3R's – relationship, reliability and responsiveness. It was instructive at the recent NCCTC conference to note that the speakers from the platform were ahead of the room in calling for just such a re-finding of the ethics of child care in how we arrange our systems and services. However the extent to which the market mechanism is now the life-world of procurement/commissioning was seen by nearly all seminars being concerned with the 3E's and 4 C's.

These are important, they provide the reality

## ing good practice, perhaps accept the status quo, or even redefine what we think of as 'good- nor strategy at its root.

of our situation, but they are not child care values and their relationship to the residential child care world of has yet to be theorised and strategized. Though the Commissioning Support Programme did many good things but the task of seeing commissioning as a parenting and child care activity was left undone.

There is no substitute for partnership for intelligent, sustainable commissioning for sufficiency and diversity based on audits of need and the fullest application of evidence in strategy for placements locally, sub-regionally, regionally and nationally as need requires. The market, even if it could do this work, will do it too slowly and we will lose further provision.

The comparison with Europe where the use of fostering and residential resources are almost completely reversed is instructive as to the balance we must ensure if we want a system that can offer stability, continuity and felt security.

### Summary ICHA research review – stability, continuity and felt security

Staub (2003) argues if we want emotionally resilient, caring, non-violent and optimally functioning young people, who fulfil needs in a constructive rather than destructive way, who have experienced a continuous evolution of effectiveness and identity as a result of continued fulfilment of these needs, who are 'connected selves', this requires support networks capable of constructively satisfying children's fundamental needs, including security, effectiveness an control, positive identity and belonging, comprehension of reality.

- From previous life experiences LAC often have profound mental health needs
- Stress including transitions, and especially those perceived as abrupt, can recreate the experience of the original trauma
- There are optimum times for transitions usually once recovery has been completed
- The more secure young people feel the fewer placements they have – 2.3 for secure, 9.5 for insecure. Stability after care is associated with stability in care
- Stability should be the default option but it is not as significant as felt security, continuity and social support. The impact of these 3 is cumulative. Stability may be precondition for felt security but is not a sufficient factor in itself.
- Make it clear when a placement is temporary or for a purpose other than a long term home for child
- Continuity of relationships is key as they bring trusting relationships, sense of security and belonging, self-efficacy and hope
- Felt security is found to predict outcomes above stability. The lived experience of stability, felt security and development of

meaningful relationships matter to young people.

- '...a pathway into stable relationships, a stable job, and a stable social network, a network that offers access to reliable social support and crucially... guarentees of connections to people with a partisan commitment to them.'
- Where children received either well modelled relationship skills in their earlier placements, or explicit teaching of these skills, the more likely they will develop cohesive relationships with alter placements
- Time is a key axis in analysis of stability. The following are key (Edwards 2002) relationship and values – parenting figures styles and values, friendship networks, daily routines, and material aspects – home, finance
- 'Stated simply, relationships are the 'active ingredients' of the environment's influence on healthy human development. They incorporate the qualities that best promote competence and wellbeing – individualised responsiveness, mutual action-and-interaction, and as an emotional connection to another human being, be it parent, peer...Relationships engage children in the human community in ways that help them define who they are, what they can become, and how and why they are important to other people (National Scientific Council on the Developing Child 2004)
- Young people can hurl themselves forwards rather than wait to be passively expelled. An ending has to be something 'good' with an acknowledgment of pain and guilt in order for the experience to be 'held' and not dropped.
- A precipice is to be avoided, the gradient must be regulated to be negotiated without damage...a new level of stability

is created in the slope down to the precipice. In this way, the self's advance towards the object is secured, and there is no danger of destructive collapse.' (Edwards 2000)

- It matters how professionals relate to each other.
- Where these are hostile they can become associated with externalising behaviour in the adolescent and where withdrawn can be seen as leading to internalised behaviours. Parenting warmth did not seem to diminish affects of parental conflict. Multiple domains are affected - Subjective emotional reactivity, overt behavioural activity and negative representations of the interparental relationships can follow (Davies and Cummings 1994)
- It could be possible for policy to require an 'optimal protocol' for each child linked to a taxonomy of fundamental emotional need outlining how the protection and nurturing the socio-emotional well-being of the young person is to be ensured by any change of placement as a core element of personality development.

#### Overall.

The decision on whether a child should be locally placed has to be a clinical one that takes account of the relationship between child and family, the effect on the child of the local environment, and the purposes and quality of the placement.

*(This conclusion is to be explored in the next ICHA research review regarding Distance as a factor in placement and which will draw a new audience to the material from adoption regarding contact and 'communicative openness'.)*

Jonathan Stanley

# Why making a claim makes sense

**Children's homes and care homes could be among businesses set to lose out if the Government ratifies proposed changes to Capital Allowances. Harrogate accountant PAUL BUSHELL explains why.**

**EVEN for the initiated it's not always simple to establish what tax breaks you're entitled to claim.**

A proactive accountant will still need to be on their toes to keep pace with changes in Government policies, which often come thick and fast if there's a change of regime or in the wake of the Budget.

For the layman, it can be nigh on impossible and there is always a risk that, the moment you discover there was a tax credit you could claim, it's the moment the Revenue announces it's been withdrawn.

And exactly that risk exists at the moment, particularly for children's homes, care homes, hotels and other businesses which have invested significantly in the property from which they operate.

Did you know, current rules allow claims for tax relief for the cost of fittings integrated and installed within a property used as the base for a business?

As a rule of thumb, it's common to find that over 20 per cent of the cost of a business' premises in the care home industry relates to

items of "embedded plant" - items such as air-conditioning and heating systems, alarm systems, lighting and electrical installations or lifts - which qualify for tax relief.

In other words, if the building was purchased for £500,000, then the buyer could be entitled to make a claim for tax relief on over £100,000. What's more, under current rules, that sum of £100,000 could be deducted in full against the profits arising in the year of acquisition.

However, in April 2012, that's all going to change. From that date onwards, the maximum amount which you will be able to set against your profits in the year of purchase will be reduced to just £25,000.

Some energy-efficient plant will still continue to attract tax relief in full in the year of purchase but any other expenditure in excess of the £25,000 ceiling will only qualify for an annual allowance of 18 per cent.

In addition, if current proposals are accepted, there will be a time limit for claims in regard to embedded plant, which will mean any claims not submitted within one or two years of purchase will be out of time.

Times are tough enough at the moment - a reason why many may not have pursued relief

available to them; the existing rules are not easy to understand and calling in a professional to interpret them is an additional cost many will be reluctant to swallow.

Protracted negotiations over tax relief and the risk that any benefit will only be felt years down the line could also deter many from investigating what they may be entitled to claim.

This means there will be businesses across the UK letting thousands of pounds slip through their fingers - and that money could make a significant difference to their bank balance.

If you are not sure whether you have made all the claims available to you, a call to your accountant could be well overdue.

Remember the money is there for all to claim - but probably not for much longer. An early review of your position could lead to a significant cash injection for your business just at a time when it's needed most.

**Paul Bushell ACA, Bushells Chartered Accountants, Harrogate**

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## 2012-What will it bring?

I hope that 2012 will be a good year for all concerned but as I write this, the economic storm clouds that hang over us do not provide a positive tone. I expect that the real impact of Local Authority (LA) cuts to become more evident.

The impact is likely to be a continuing reduction in prices that LA's are prepared to pay the services in residential care.

Contracting out services such as contact supervision, fostering and adoption may be seen by some authorities to make good financial sense. In order to save costs I expect that LA's will seek to place more of its young persons within county or unitary authority.

At the same time I foresee that the expectations of your service provision will remain the same. In an attempt to prevent further inroads to your turnover, I am providing an early selection box, suggest a number of targets that you can consider that will be helpful for the bank balance; good for the young persons.

### Care plans

Look carefully at the new National Minimum Standards. There is scope to tighten up and be in greater control over the administration and management of the young persons.

For me, the delivery of the child's care plan is at the heart of what you do. However, it is a common occurrence that a lot of effort is expended in getting that plan on to the child's file in the home. Failure by the Local Authority to set up a placement meeting and deliver the care plan - is still your responsibility to Ofsted and to the child to demonstrate that you have up to date documents from the placing Local Authority.

There is often confusion about communication between parents/social workers and the young person. If you have not already considered changing the way you have dialogue with the young person's social worker, then I encourage you to do so. If there is no clear arrangement, you should dictate the terms and notify the Local Authority of what is expected.

These actions should have a several fold benefit to you and the young person;

1. You will save a lot of time and resources trying to settle the everyday routine of the young person
2. You become a more visible presence at LAC reviews
3. You have more control over the care of the young person
4. You are less likely to fall foul of criticism by Ofsted
5. In the medium to longer term you will enhance your reputation and trust with placing Local Authorities.

### Contracts - review, update and changes

On a different tack but of importance is to look at your terms of business with Local Authorities. This is a difficult area, not least because you may fear that being sharper on your payment terms may deter referrals. In these times it should be easier for you to review and change because that is what is being done by Local Authorities.

Like almost everything in law, there is always room for interpretation of words. I strongly

*continued on page 7*

advise that if you have anything more than 28 -30 days credit, you should reduce it to 28 - 30 days. Secondly, you should charge interest for late payment. Thirdly, your accounts department should be chasing the payer, by letter at least.

As a party to a contract you need to know what exactly are your contractual obligations. Changing existing contracts requires both parties to agree and that is likely to involve some horse trading. However, new contracts are a different matter especially where you are providing the service. Thus you should aim to limit the payment period, charge a rate of interest for default. However in order to maintain good customer relations, consider giving notice to Local Authorities that new

placements will have your new terms and conditions.

### Factoring

Some of you will use factors for recovering your fees. It has advantages and disadvantages. It can be very expensive. Look at your terms and conditions with your factor. Can you afford to collect your income yourself? If you can then this is an area where you will cut costs with no adverse effect. Financial pressures affect us all.

### Selling/ giving up

This is a radical option. It is highly likely in the short term to reduce your debts and I know that a number of smaller providers are seeking

to sell up. It does have its attractions but could lead to there being less providers over the next few years, adversely affecting, as ICHA points out the range and choice of placements for young people. However, reality may be that the decision to sell may be chosen or forced. A sale out of choice is obviously preferable and it is an obvious statement to make that choosing this option certainly requires legal help.

**Raphael Silver,**  
Partner, Silver Fitzgerald, Solicitors & Advocates, Cambridge.

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They were also taken, as experienced people with an informed insight as well as being parents, by the way in which looked after children are often left to fend for themselves from the age of 16 whereas children in traditional families have a safety net until they are well into their 20s and beyond. There was good discussion over the fears residents react against on hearing a children's home is to open in their neighbourhood. The ICHA recently met an MP who recalled receiving many representations from people who feared the worst but after a while all went silent as the fears of a vocal minority didn't happen. He suggested that residential child care companies should be pro-active informing MPs and councillors early on in order to allay fears. MPs and others are obliged to listen to their constituents. It's best if we add to their knowledge so they are better able to assuage alarmist notions.

The MPs heard the neighbours of the homes we visited had had such worries but have become accustomed to living near a home. This was a very good start to a longer and deeper engagement with policy-makers. By providing accurate information and opportunities to get more direct experience of residential life the clear lesson is that children's homes are doing an increasingly good job. This must not be hidden from view any longer. The positive views towards residential child care made time after time by young people - the customer so to speak - should be amplified.

Yes, their confidentiality must be kept but children's homes have nothing to hide and much to celebrate. And we should not allow residential care to be counterposed to early intervention. If that is so it remains only a last resort. The priority of the government is towards early intervention policies. Imagination

and pragmatism can see residential care being in the mix here too. It requires active rethinking, recovering and renewing residential successes from the past. It will require policy makers to reshape their ideas.

The Committee's visit will help increase such understanding but, compared to adoption where the Times newspaper has put its reputation and resources behind an imaginative campaign to make it easier to adopt, we are way behind the curve. A sad sign of this was the almost complete neglect of looked after children at the recent party political conferences. There is an urgent need for the ICHA to redress this by working with others, including MPs, to further increase understanding. The visit to Barnsley was a good beginning.



Amber House. Left to Right: Jonathan Stanley, Rebecca Green, Roy Williamson, Sue Gellen, Craig Whittaker, Pat Glass, Gary Kent, Ian Mearns, Lis Bates, Graham Stuart, Luiz Guilherme.

# Political Report



*Pennine View. Left to right: Lis Bates, Ian Mearns, Roy Williamson, Gary Kent, Steve Guirey, Pat Glass, Graham Stuart, Jonathan Stanley, Dianne Lodge, Craig Whittaker, Josh Wright.*

## Select Committee member's visit ICHA homes

There's an old residential child care saying 'Show me don't tell me.' Seeing is believing was the purpose of a visit to ICHA homes in the Barnsley area by members of the Commons Select Committee on Education.

The Chairman Graham Stuart was accompanied by fellow Conservative MP Craig Whittaker and two Labour MPs, Ian Mearns and Pat Glass together with the Committee Clerk Lis Bates. The delegation was joined by myself, the ICHA's new policy and practice consultant, Jonathan Stanley and Roy Williamson, ICHA Executive Officer.

The role of the Committee is to keep an eye on all the activities of the Department for Education and this visit was part of a general inquiry into the state of child protection. Lazy thinking suggests that MPs are cocooned in a Westminster bubble but they see more of our society and meet more people than the scribes who find them an easy target.

Each member of this parliamentary delegation is steeped in education policy from their lives before Westminster which is why they elected to join the committee and to join this fact-finding exercise. Their probing questions and discussion showed the range and depth of their knowledge and their willingness to be shown effective practice that works. The trip demystified key points turning theoretical notions of what works in children's homes into living reality.

The proof will be in the pudding - the next report of the Committee - but they experienced first hand the life stories from

young people who also explained the reason why some children and young people need and value a residential opportunity. Their stories are graphic but during this visit the harsh reality will have registered with the MPs. They saw for themselves that even small homes have big demands in terms of staffing ratios which helps explain why the weekly cost of residential care is higher than other forms of care, although they also heard that we need more research to properly assess claims about the cost of local authority provision and fostering.

They will have registered our expert view that too many children in residential care get there too late having suffered multiple and inappropriate placements to save money. In discussion, they understood the increasingly widely shared view that this is a false economy because placing children in the wrong setting only builds up higher social costs in the long-term. One MP knew that many who looked after children frequently go on needing help into adult life, a sizeable number encounter mental health problems and end up in prison.

They also know that the standard Treasury response to those who make the case for looking at the plight of looked after children in a long-term and holistic manner is to say that the case is difficult to prove and that there will be a period of time in which current and future costs are doubled up before any dividend shows itself. The ICHA has the opportunity to be a major voice in promoting this argument and work with other organisations to spread the word.

This reinforces the central thrust of our approach which is that residential is right, it should be seen as the first rather than the

Lazy thinking suggests that MPs are cocooned in a Westminster bubble but they see more of our society and meet more people than the scribes who find them an easy target.

last resort for children who are assessed as needing what it has to offer them. There should be no over-riding of their care needs. They will have seen for themselves the passion of our managers in seeking to make a difference to severely traumatised children - giving them a reason to get up in the morning, as one manager put it.

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## Gary Kent our political lobbyist – brief profile

Gary Kent has worked in Parliament for two decades and is also active in providing solidarity to Iraqi civil society organisations and seeking to increase integrated education between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland.

