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# A Welcome from the new Co-Chairs

**Paul O'Leary:**

I am delighted to have the opportunity to support the ongoing work of ICHA as a co-chair with Jim and Pauline. I am a great believer in the work of the organisation and have seen tremendous benefits to my own workplace and other young people placed in residential children's services. I am confident that the momentum of former chair's will not be lost as not only have they set in motion many sustainable work streams but have also consolidated ICHA's presence as the recognised national voice for Independent Residential Childcare. When I first joined ICHA I quickly became aware that I would get out of it what I put in and this continues to be the case. I now have ten years experience in the sector and have developed what are robust and quality residential services for the young people in my care. I would not have achieved such success without the personal support and networking opportunities from other ICHA members, who never cease to surprise me with their willingness to help, despite the pressures of their own workloads. The last ten years have presented many new challenges, sleepless nights and feelings of isolation, however through ICHA I have found communality and friendships which have helped shape both me and my business. I hope I can support other providers in the manner in which I have benefited as an ICHA member and am therefore determined to support my co-chairs in continuing

the growth and positive work of our association. I do have to apologise for my lack of IT skills as I am yet to find time to learn the finer art of e-mail, so you may find most of our communication is by telephone. I am unfortunately a Luddite but slowly coming round to modern thinking! I am very excited about working alongside Roy & Gail, my co-chairs, fellow committee members and ICHA members to help support and develop services for all young people across the residential network.

**Pauline Webster:**

As a newcomer to ICHA, it was with some trepidation I offered to be co-chair with Jim and Paul. The trepidation is as with all of us, a heavy enough workload, however I think and feel that what has been done and what needs to be continued is crucial, that is, raising awareness of the young people we represent and the fantastic work done by our staff, often in stark contrast to some of the edicts that are presented by government, and how care is represented in the media.

I am very aware that Alison and Danny have had a huge part in ensuring ICHA is well represented in a variety of ways that enables us to be part of forums where residential care is being thought about. Clearly they have been able to work well together with the rest of the committee to get us to our current position.

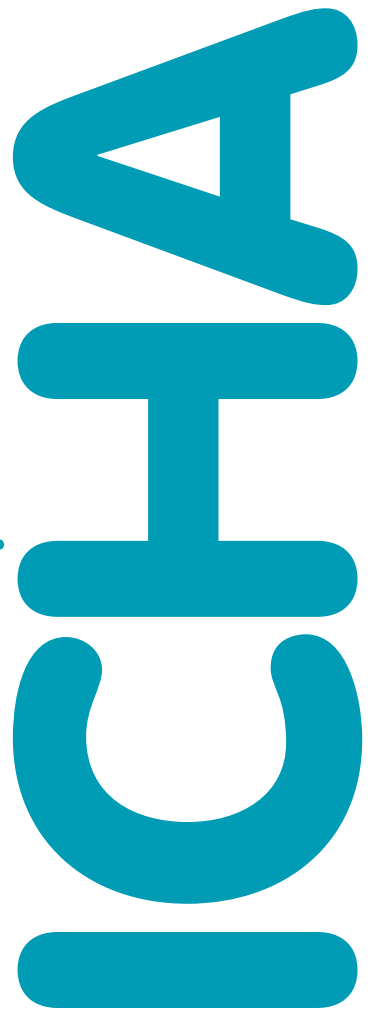
I think the new co-chairs now have a good platform to continue this work. I am pleased that the three of us represent the North, Midlands and the South ensuring we can be a national force.

We all have our specific interest, mine for example is workforce development and I will hope to keep you up to date re this evolving period through the bulletin.

**Jim Sullivan:**

I have taken the role as co-chair of ICHA knowing that we take on the baton from two excellent chairs. My own organisation have benefited from being part of ICHA. The information has helped us to keep up to date with a constantly changing market place. The networking aspect of ICHA has been invaluable as we have learned so much from other members. When challenges have been difficult the opportunity to share these with other members has been reassuring as people often have the same concerns.

The committee members of ICHA have worked hard over the last few years to place ICHA in the forefront of policy and decision making in all relevant areas of childcare, I can only hope to continue the excellent work in my role in the present committee.



## Diary dates

**2009**

17th March 1pm – WICHA Meeting - Cardiff

8th April – Midlands & South West Regional Meeting – Mitcheldean, Gloucester (more details to follow)

5th May 1.30pm – Northern Regional Meeting – Haigh Hall, Wigan.

9th June – ICHA Committee & General Meetings – Bedworth. Committee Meeting at 10am followed by General Meeting at 1pm. Lunch available at 12.30pm for everyone.

The Southern Regional Meeting to be announced soon.

# Political Report

There is a persistent undercurrent of criticism of residential care homes from left and right. Typically, commentators take one look at the headline cost figures and conclude with great fanfare that residential care, which is mainly in the independent sector, is too expensive.

For example, a blogger recently compiled a list of 100 ways in which local councils could cut their costs. Three of his points related to looked after children.

He urged councils to overcome “bureaucratic delay or politically correct prejudices” and place more children in adoption – “permanent loving homes.” He asked people to check the performance as measured by the number of looked after children per 10,000 children in their area.

He then added that remaining children in care should where possible be sent to boarding schools. He concluded that “where children remain in care, keep to a minimum sending them to institutional children’s home, but place them for fostering in family homes. This is much better for the children. Also even the specialist, highly paid foster carers who can cope with ‘challenging’ children are far less costly than the phenomenally expensive children’s homes.”

ICHA members will immediately see the flaws and chopped logic in this tabloid analysis. This blogger and others who make ill-informed criticisms would have benefitted from the fact-finding trip to a children’s home in Luton recently undertaken by Lord Listowel, Co-Chair of the Associate Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, and myself.

The ICHA has built a good relationship with Lord Listowel over the last few years. He has some personal experience of volunteering at Centrepoint and takes a deep and passionate interest in the plight of looked after children. He was highly active in finessing the Children and Young Persons Bill in the Lords.

He also kindly recently hosted a working supper at the Lords. This was with representatives from the ICHA, the Tavistock Centre and the NSPCC.

In addition, there was Jonathan Stanley Manager of the National Centre for Excellence in Residential Child Care and Children’s Residential Network at the National Children’s Bureau and Eilis Lawlor from the new economics foundation.

Eilis is the author of the the foundation’s comendable and independent report which emphasises the long-term value of good residential child care. She has agreed in principle to address the next ICHA conference.

The supper aimed to start a dialogue between practitioners, policy-makers and

parliamentarians. As part of this process, Lord Listowel expressed the desire to join a fact-finding trip to a children’s home.

This is clearly the best way to pursue a serious engagement with the issues. Our hope is that this is the precursor to a further fact-finding visit by the new Children’s Minister, Baroness Delyth Morgan in co-operation with Lord Listowel and the ICHA

But our first stop was Luton to an ordinary looking house which used to be an elderly people’s home and can now accommodate up to six children, although it normally has four children.

The owner, Nick outlined his own background which includes long stints in the voluntary and local authority sectors. He feels that he now has more freedom to focus purely on residential care and the ability to respond quickly and creatively to situations and the needs of the young people.

We tackled the costs issue directly. As is often the case, the headline figures seem very high but account needs to be taken of the fact that the home is highly labour-intensive and pays for psychological training and other services. This one has four children but eleven staff – three on at any particular time.

Nick makes the point that the costs are probably less than that of council homes when hidden costs such as public buildings, insurance, management and vacancy rates are included in the comparison.

Nick and his colleagues entirely accept that the cheaper option of fostering is right for many looked after children but this clearly doesn’t apply to the four young people at this home.

They are amongst the minority of looked after children who have parents with whom, for one reason or another, their relations have been “cooked”, are not looking for a replacement mum or dad but who need help from caring professionals.

We discussed the educational issues. It’s so often the case that children in residential care do very poorly in examinations but the complex reasons behind this need to be examined in detail.

For example, one of the children had over 20 foster placements between the age of 6-15 before coming to the home. Commentators should think of the impact this would have on them if they had moved so many times in such a short time. Put bluntly, it’s difficult to get a GCSE if you have moved so often or haven’t even been in school for two years.

And yet the educational achievements of looked after children in continental Europe are much better with 60% going into higher education compared to about 6% here. It’s also the case that in countries like France and Germany quality residential care is often the first resort rather than the last one in the ladder of care.

The persistent problem in the UK is that children are placed in foster care when it is the wrong option. It then takes many failed placements for that message to be made very clear. These “failed” children then go to a home and then policy-makers and the press seem surprised that they don’t do well in school. It is the system failing the child, not the child failing the system.

Another theme we talked through is that GCSEs are not the only way of measuring success. There has to be some recognition that

*Gary Kent, ICHA’s Political Lobbyist (centre) with Marlene Whyte, Deputy Manager, and Lord Listowel*



residential care can do much to improve the emotional ability of sometimes highly damaged children to make relationships and look after themselves.

Another part of the persistent tragedy of many looked after children is that they enter a generational spiral of decline involving drugs, alcohol, abuse, prison and that this can cascade to their own children.

We also tackled the question of the qualifications of the workforce. There is a widespread view that the skills base of the workforce should be increased. Nick stressed that it was also essential to hire staff with an aptitude for the work, a sense of humour, who enjoy working with children and as part of a team and who could be positive role models for them as well as a "good parent." They need a wide range of interests too so they can take part with enthusiasm in a range of activities such as going to skating and football with the children in the evening.

The question of children in residential care having to leave at 16 as opposed to fostered children who leave at 18 was discussed. Both these leaving ages are very young compared to the majority of young people who, not least in these tough economic times, often stay into their mid twenties. There had been a move to increase the fostering leaving age to 21 and the ICHA needs to discuss the plight of those whose support runs out at the age of 16 in our homes.

Nick and his colleagues explained the rhythm of work in the home, the role of key-workers and we observed the daily staff handover as well as having a free-ranging discussion with children and staff over a lovely lunch which they had kindly prepared.

*Lord Listowel attends a 'handover' meeting with Hailey Smith and Kevin Mullins*



Lord Listowel said: "I am very grateful to Nick Taylor, Director of Focus Residential Childcare Ltd, for allowing me to visit his independent children's home. I appreciated his sharing his concerns about the independence of Independent Reviewing Officers and respect for the Care Plan, access to independent advocacy services and the quality of commissioning. It was a pleasure to hear from one of the residents, over a good lunch, that here she had found the stability that had not been provided in her many foster placements.

I was glad to learn that the home had effectively reduced absconding in its residents compared with their earlier placements. I was saddened to hear that some of the young people were experiencing frequent changes of social worker in their home authority. I hope this is something the government may begin to address through its social work taskforce.

I am very thankful to the ICHA, in particular Alison Trainor and Danny Curran, for their work in raising awareness among parliamentarians of the importance to children of good quality residential care. I spoke recently with Baroness Morgan of Drefelin, the children's minister in the Lords, about the importance of such good quality provision for children, have raised the matter on the floor of the House and will raise this with Ed Balls, the Secretary of State, when I meet with him in mid March."

Lord Listowel has since invited the children and Nick to tea in the Lords which would be a wonderful and unique event that would leave a lasting memory.



## 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.

In the new ICHA Handbook we did not change details for Witherslack Care and Education Initiatives. Please note that the new details are:

Title: Witherslack Care & Education Initiatives  
(A member of the Witherslack Group)  
Address: Derwent House, Mandale Business  
Park, Belmont Estate, Durham, DH1 1TH.  
Tel: 08448806520  
Fax: 08448806521  
Email: [office@wcei.co.uk](mailto:office@wcei.co.uk)  
Website: [www.wcei.co.uk](http://www.wcei.co.uk)

Witherslack Care & Education Initiatives have opened "The Grange", a dynamic and innovative specialist Children's Home and learning facility in the North East of England, details of which are now available.

Our sincerest apologies go to our colleagues at Witherslack Care & Education Initiatives for this error.

# Getting the best information to manage the care of your children and young persons.

## Think National Minimum Standards 2,3,4 and 7.

Doesn't time fly? The National Minimum Standards will be 7 years old in March 2009. My title is deliberately cryptic because if you feel you know all about NMS, there is no harm and much good of reminding yourselves of these four standards – that are key to effective outcomes for children and young persons.

It is a fair assumption to make that most if not all of those you care for have received less than good enough parenting at critical times in their lives. The severity of the deficit in good enough care and the need to make good that deficit is part of your organisation's raison d'être. The need to provide skilled therapeutic care and help can be integral part of the care you provide. How do you assess that need?

The first part of the process is the profile you receive from the placing Local Authority. You may have enough information to decide whether you can provide a placement but that is not the same as being in possession of the full information. A planned rather than emergency admission gives you the opportunity to get the full picture.

I remember some years ago driving from Cambridge to Devon to a home that was accommodating two young persons who were the subjects of care proceedings. Neither the home, nor higher management had been given information yet there was a wealth of expert opinion provided to the court that the Local Authority had not disclosed the existence of, never mind the content, to the home. Sadly, that experience of being kept in the dark, is still evident. Think what Ofsted would say in terms of auditing your decision to admit and then to care without seeking the full picture – especially for a young person who needs that therapeutic help. The blame may lie with the Local Authority but the responsibility will lie with you.



What you may be missing are;

1. Education records including SSENs.
2. Medical records/reports in respect of the young person's physical, emotional and mental health.
3. Expert reports prepared for court proceedings relating to the young person and his/her relationship with significant adults in their lives ( especially family members)
4. Pre Sentence reports and risk assessments undertaken by Youth Justice.
5. Local Authority care plans past and present.

So here is a simple legal checklist to make sure you get the information you need with the permission of the people you need:

1. Don't take the first batch of information from the Local Authority as all you need to know.
2. Ask what further expert/medical reports are in existence.
3. Do you need to read them and if so, who in your company needs to have access to them and for what purpose.
4. The legal status of who you are accommodating is essential. Access to the necessary information is different if the person is accommodated under S20 of the

Children Act 1989 from those under a Care Order ( S31) or Interim Care Order (S38) or Interim/Supervision Orders S35. There is a hybrid for those who come to you from Secure Accommodation – under S25.

5. There is a separate category of document in respect of those placed with you who are under community sentences imposed by Youth Courts – and to add further complication, this category could exist in tandem with any of the possibilities under 4.
6. Those accommodated under S20 – it is those having parental responsibility who can give consent - in most cases the parents – although you will need to check that father has PR. What you need is written permission addressed to whoever holds the report etc that you want,
7. All other categories under 4– almost certainly you will need the assistance of the Local Authority to obtain any report prepared for the purposes of family proceedings. It is then the responsibility of the Local Authority to obtain the necessary consent to disclose the documents to you. Be aware that although the mechanics of getting the consents is relatively straightforward, it is not urgent work on a lawyer's desk, so be prepared for delay.
8. Criminal/Probation records - establish who has parental responsibility as for 4 and 5. However, given that the documents are not necessarily copied to the Local Authority, you may well need the consent of the Young Person concerned to obtain these records.

It never ceases to amaze me that in respect of medical reports, once in possession of this information, there is a reluctance to contact the author of such expert reports to seek further guidance and support.

Armed with all the relevant information, you can optimise your compliance with the NMS and achieve more for your young persons.

### Raphael Silver

Silver Fitzgerald Solicitors and Advocates, Cambridge.  
[r.silver@silverfitzgerald.co.uk](mailto:r.silver@silverfitzgerald.co.uk)

## A message from our newsletter sponsors

Bollington Care is one of the UK's leading insurance brokers for children's homes.

From the time early this decade, when insurance for children's homes became near impossible to find, we at Bollington have worked with the sector to reduce insurance risks. We have also helped educate and persuade insurers that children's homes are sound risks to insure. The result is that insurance is now more freely available on more competitive terms.

Insurance in the care sector however, remains a specialist area requiring expert advice and support. We are wholly devoted to care insurance giving us a vital edge against our competitors. Our experienced account

managers offer face to face support nationwide, backed up by internal staff who have the expertise to handle all aspects of care insurance and risk management.

Our expertise also gives us an advantage with insurers and we are able to negotiate very competitive premiums, without sacrificing valuable cover, particularly for ICHA members.

In fact we already insure a third of ICHA members.

So if you would like a free no obligation insurance review and quotation please contact us on 0800 195 4911. Even if your renewal is not yet due soon, it is worth speaking to us now.

# Are transition plans working for those most vulnerable in our society?

New Forest Care is a small, very specialist service working with exceptionally complex or dual diagnosis adolescents from the acute end of the scale. The client group often pose a significantly high risk to themselves or to the community. New Forest Care works with this country's top 10% of those most challenging and almost impossible to place young people. The theoretical base it operates from is an attachment model. As such, they offer a non exclusion guarantee. They do not give up on young people, regardless of behaviours exhibited. Each project is truly bespoke and built around the specific needs of the young person. This is identified within the comprehensive assessment process undertaken by the child and adolescent Psychiatrist, Psychotherapist, RMN, Education staff, Social workers and Care managers. There are no square pegs in round holes here.

My involvement with this incredible organisation began almost 5 years ago, when I was asked to provide social work consultancy. Since then, I have observed the development of young people, as well as staff and managers, and been astounded at the high levels of passion and determination to achieve exceptional outcomes, which permeates throughout the whole organisation.

By joining ICHA, New Forest Care is able to use the collective voice to raise political awareness and enter into debates, which hopefully influence for the better, how young people, in care and when they leave care, are treated.

As young people progress and grow towards their 18th birthday, I find our society begins to take a different view of what is needed. Surprising as it seems, when that magical age arrives, many professionals suddenly panic, throw their hands up in dismay and attempt to put together a plan of sorts. I understand that the aforementioned persons are incredibly busy with other cases and legal duties. This article is not an exercise in laying individual blame. It aims to look at the absurdity of some of the current systems and processes in place within our culture and challenge this.

I know as a previous local authority practitioner, the gate keeping and constraints on my budgets; the funding clock ticks from first accommodation, which often was years and years previously. Then, overnight, the 18th birthday is heralded with loud chimes, followed by the internal fights between child / adult care and health, making an interesting, albeit frustrating, ring side seat experience.

Surely the level of support which is needed by a young person aged 17 years and 364 days, is likely to be the same as aged 18 years 0 days, or even similar at 18 years 6 months? Do these complex, incredibly disadvantaged individuals suddenly metamorphosis and transform into adults who are no longer vulnerable or need support when they wake up?



I believed we actually lived in a First world society. By definition, this is technologically advanced and whose citizens have a high quality lifestyle; a society whose citizens enjoy a lifestyle which is rich with quality housing, access to medical care, good food, education opportunities, transportation, communications, employment opportunities and services provided by the state. I am further informed by the International Monetary Fund that the UK is classified as an 'advanced economy', one where there is a good system for supporting those who are the most disadvantaged and vulnerable.

So it is official. We live in a country whose culture is filled with those who care about each other. One where all men (or women) are equal or, to coin a phrase by George Orwell, do we actually live in a culture where all men are equal but some are more equal than others? Those who nicely fit into what we categorise and deem as 'norm' in our society, appear to me, to be far more equal.

I naively believed that service availability was actually dependent on identified needs, regardless of where you live, or who originally paid for your care. Why is it that some of those commissioning services, such as New Forest Care offers, promote an attachment to be formed, yet believe that post 18, this is no longer relevant? Don't adults have attachments too, which helps to increase their resilience? I know I most certainly do.

So what actually happens to our specific complex young people, who are now young adults? I use the term 'our' as I believe we, as a society, have a collective moral responsibility towards ensuring their safety and continued well being. For the majority of main stream young people, a transition plan is in place which creatively works. For the minority, the high level of services required, by them, is withdrawn purely due to funding, lack of integrated approach and clear foresight. The impact of this can be catastrophic on their lives. Statistics abound about how many care leavers are deemed to be homeless, involved in the criminal justice system, filling

the prisons and mental health hospitals, or, tragically, taking their own lives.

These young adults, who often due to their continued vulnerabilities society now rejects and locks up, are the same people who have been rejected as children, over and over again through placement breakdowns. These are the children we work with and are responsible for in this industry. These are human beings who will never be round pegs, no matter how hard they try to be, or attempt to fit in with the rest of society. Should our society not try to fit in with them, not the other way around? Research suggests that the financial costs to services (NHS, prisons, various agencies etc), in the longer term, are greater than had support been provided when required. Prevention is better than cure; we all know this. The social cost on the individual I would suggest is even greater. A stitch in time saves nine and many other simple platitudes can be used here to elaborate a point.

So the UK is an advanced economy, although the reality is that it is filled with care leavers, who have poor housing (if any), little adequate support, unable to access specialist medical services, do not have the same equality of access to opportunities the rest of us as citizens demand and enjoy. How acceptable is this? For me and many of my colleagues, it most certainly is not. It is a shocking and abhorrent reflection of a culture which prides itself that it actually cares. Shame on us if we allow this hideous monster, to continue unchecked. This is where we as individuals and collectively should be harnessing the powers we have both intellectually and emotionally. We need to engage the proper authorities in Government whether local or national to create a force, which will enhance the life opportunities of these individuals and society as a whole.

**Pakinam White  
works for new  
ICHA Members  
New Forest Care.**



# Foster Carer couples given joint working option on TSD workbooks

Couples who are jointly approved as carers are being offered a more streamlined way of completing their workbooks.

All foster carers are required to complete the Induction and Workbook to Foster Care as part of Training Support and Development Standards (TSD) developed by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC).

The standards set out the key areas of training that foster carers require before they are approved,

and what they need after approval, as well as providing a benchmark for the continuing professional development (CPD), training and supervision of social care workers.

The Department of Children Schools and Families (DCSF) has agreed the new way of working following feedback from the series of consultation events being held across the country.

Ann Harrison, National Programme Manager for Social Care at CWDC, said: "We have listened to what

foster carers and stakeholders have told us and as a result, have made this change to help jointly approved carers to complete their workbooks.

"If you are a foster caring couple and you have already started individual workbooks please carry on. We would just like to make it more streamlined for those couples who are about to start the process."

In the 12 months following approval, foster carers will use the

workbook to gather evidence that they have met the TSD Standards in this area and build a portfolio which includes annual review reports and supervision notes.

The new agreement by DCSF means that joint carers will be able to use a joint workbook to submit evidence relating to both carers as well as individual examples.

Further information on TSD Standards for Foster Carers can be found at <https://cwdcouncil.org.uk/foster-care/standards/faqs>

## Coaching for a change

Coaching is ever more popular but maybe increasingly less understood. When I last Googled "coaching", I got 76,900,000 results – staggering! Unlike many other things, it appears recession proof.

Coaching should be one of the most important tools for change in children's organisations particularly in tight financial conditions. It focuses on skills, knowledge and behaviours of staff. Coaching offers the opportunity to embed learning within the organisation rather than to rest precariously in one individual's head. Coaching gets past the ever present arguments about limited resources to invest in training. It asks what is being learnt on a day by day basis, and in supervision and appraisal to strengthen staff competences.

In short, it is a key means to translate positive statements about improving performance into effect.

Yet the potential of coaching itself is often not realised. Much of the online offer on coaching is sadly repackaged general consultancy assistance or training with a popular label. Inside organisations, managers often insist that they are coaching, when it might appear that they are just doing some of the basics of supervision but not enough to develop staff. Of course, as the Google results show, nobody has a monopoly on the use of the term!

In 15 years as an external management coach, working over that time with around 25 coachees, I've found each coachee has brought different needs and

demands to our sessions. Sessions have varied in their frequency. I have worked with some coachees over several years. There are a number of themes have been more present than others:

**Influencing stakeholders:** particularly where stakeholders commission or fund services, or are gatekeepers to policy development or resources;

**Supporting governance:** with a growing emphasis on educating and often energising Boards, particularly where Board members serve on a voluntary basis;

**Strengthening senior teams:** notably around team roles and engaging with more corporate responsibilities;

**Tackling staffing issues:** including ways to change stuck behaviours, and evaluate choices in reorganisation to meet changing service requirements;

**Personal and professional development:** to consolidate personal learning, practice different approaches, and manage the demands and stresses of the role alongside a real life outside work;

**Longer term thinking:** around developing strategies and plans that could help the organisation be well positioned to take opportunities.

*Hilary Barnard is a strategy and change consultant, specialising in supporting children and young people's services. He can be contacted at [hilarybarnard@aol.com](mailto:hilarybarnard@aol.com)*

## ICHA's new committee for 2009

With a record number of members, ICHA looks forward to the year 2009 and the challenges ahead. Last year's Co-Chairs, Alison Trainor and Danny Curran have stepped down, although they will remain on the Committee; whilst Jim Sullivan (*Thoughts of Others*), Pauline Webster (*Childhood First*) and Paul O'Leary (*Cornerstones*) have taken up the vacant Co-Chair positions. At the Committee Meeting held in Birmingham on 24th February, roles and responsibilities for the coming year were agreed as follows:

**Co-Chairs** Paul O'Leary (*Cornerstones*), Jim Sullivan (*Thoughts of Others*), Pauline Webster (*Childhood First*).

**Treasurer** Steve Lord (*Specialist Education Services*)

**Membership Secretary** Paul O'Leary

(*Cornerstones*) supported by Niel Shelmerdine (*Meadows Care*).

**Political Work** Gary Kent (*ICHA Political Lobbyist*), Joe Crosbie (*Childhood First*), Jim Sullivan (*Thoughts of Others*)

**Press Officer** Danny Curran (*Care Afloat*)

**Website** Mike La-Borde (*Family Care Associates*)

**Ofsted** Alison Trainor (*Oracle Care*)

**Children's Rights** Karen Mitchell-Mellor (*Halliwell Homes*)

**Business & Development Plan** Steve Lord (*SES*)

**Marketing** to be incorporated into Membership role but with assistance from member Pauline Flavin (*Prospects for Young People*) and Committee Member Peter O'Neill (*Keys Group*).

**Information/Research** Gary Kent (*ICHA Political Lobbyist*) supported by Steve Elliott (*SACCS*).

There was also a sub-group appointed to oversee the organisation of the next ICHA Conference. The members of this group are: John Branchflower (*Zenith*), Karen Mitchell-Mellor (*Halliwell Homes*), Niel Shelmerdine (*Meadows Care*) and Roy Williamson, Executive Officer, ICHA.

It was agreed that instead of having someone on the Committee responsible for Diversity & Equality, we would endeavour to have this as a theme running throughout all of ICHA's work.

Much of ICHA's success in recent years has been due to the organisation remaining actively involved at a political and strategic level, locally, regionally and nationally. We acknowledged that it is important that we maintain our inclusion in the various decision-making forums that effect

# Bridging the Gap: Agency Staff

## Introduction

With the introduction of evolving government initiatives, changes in reforms and significant investment into Social Care; The UK's Social Care market has undergone massive transformation.

Since 2004 (within the Children Care Sector) new initiatives have been introduced to improve and develop the approaches used in the well-being of children and young people. Initiatives such as Every Child Matters, Options for Excellence (DfES/DH 2006) The Children's Workforce strategy (DfES 2005) and the newly introduced; Building Brighter Futures; Next Steps For the Children's Workforce (DCSF 2008) have all been introduced to help deliver the aims and vision set out to create a more integrated and improved care sector.

By introducing higher expectations and changing work patterns, The Children's workforce is a key area in which improvement and change is expected. A recent survey estimated there are around 168,340 workers currently employed in children's services out of which; 23,340 worked in just over 1,300 voluntary and private children's residential homes.

Recruitment and retention seems to be the main focus for a lot of employers in trying to create effective teams and to ensure demands are adequately met. The average turnover of care staff in the private sector is estimated at 28.2% (LAWIG 2007), vacancy rates are currently averaging 5.6%. Many employers are opting to use agency staff to fill the gap that has been created.

Many employers only use agency staff as a temporary fix, but with more and more changes being introduced, can employers and agencies work more effectively in helping each other create a platform to attract, develop and nurture new recruits into social care?

our sector. As stated above, assisting our Political Lobbyist, Gary Kent with the political work will be Jim Sullivan and Joe Crosbie from Childhood First. We remain in close contact with ministers in the Commons and the House of Lords and aim to continue our good relationship with the DCSF, where recent changes in personnel have taken place. Members will be responsible for attending forums and reporting back as follows:

**NCERCC** Steve Lord (*SES*).

**National Contract** Pauline Webster (*Childhood First*), Alison Trainor (*Oracle Care*).

**West Midlands Consortium** Anthony Walters (*Abronah Care*), Jim Sullivan (*Thoughts of Others*).

**Children Law UK (CLUK)** Jim Sullivan (*Thoughts of Others*), Danny Curran (*Care Afloat*).

## The Introduction of Agency Staff – The History

As the Children's Care Sector has evolved and inevitably become more focused on developing better approaches, the demands upon its workforce have also changed. This has partly contributed towards introducing agency staff, where ad-hoc staff are used in emergency cases to cover absences, vacancies or short term assignments.

## The Stigma attached to recruitment agencies

Initially many of the staff provided by agencies were not adequately trained or experienced enough to work within the care sector, this consequently led to standards decreasing whilst at the same time the sector was growing. The standard of care provided by agencies in previous years can be linked to the lack of knowledge that the owners of agencies had themselves about the sector; agencies did not usually specialise in a particular product (i.e. social care) but instead focused on filling recruitment needs to an array of industries.

Agency workers being provided for these settings were usually unqualified, un-trained and inexperienced in working with the complexities of challenging behaviour. This often led to homes being provided with inadequate workers leading to high levels of risk for all concerned, thus contributing towards a stigma being attached to many agency workers which is still evident within some elements of the modern care sector.

Another element of concern to regular residential staff is that agency workers are not an immediate solution to staffing problems in a team that is already over-stretched; by virtue of the fact that there is an element of time required by core members to induct and support an agency worker. This time is consequently seen as wasted when there is a high turnover of agency staff coming in and out of a home.

**Children's Rights and SCIE** Karen Mitchell Mellor (*Hallivell Homes*).

**Children's Workforce Development Council** Pauline Webster (*Childhood First*).

**nef report** Joe Crosbie (*Childhood First*).

**CRB/ISA** Danny Curran (*Care Afloat*), Amanda Knowles (*Horizon Care*).

Alison will remain our link-person with Ofsted and Danny will continue his role of media spokesperson. Committee Members John Branchflower (*Zenith*) and Richard Hilditch (*Continuum*) will provide the link between the Welsh ICHA and the main committee.

## Helping to create a higher skilled workforce

The modernisation of the care sector and its workforce through new government initiatives has had a positive effect in creating attractive career opportunities.

Demands within residential homes have changed, employers are seeking individuals that are qualified, experienced and trained to come and make an effective difference.

As standards within the care sector continue to grow, it is important for Health & Social Care Agencies to understand this and follow the trend. Staff supplied on an ad-hoc basis must be to the same standard as permanent residential support workers, this is why the relationship between homes and agencies has to be entwined with one another, so that both are working together to bridge gaps that currently exist and try to create a higher skilled workforce.

## Setting the Standard

Finding the right person for the right job is crucial. More agencies must be dedicated to the employment needs of each of their clients, and need to show more commitment to the vision set in creating a higher skilled workforce.

Agencies collectively should aim to create a better synergy of work with clients; by changing the culture, values and professionalism shown by previous agencies. This may be a good place to start in setting a new standard of service.

Effective training, in depth recruitment processes, stringent vetting and working by the rules set in recruitment and social care (e.g. the Care Standards Act 2000, The Asylum and Immigration Act 1996, The Immigration, Asylum and Nationality Act 2006 and The Employment Agencies Act 1973.) may also help induce the trust and consistency that many clients are looking for. It may also set a new benchmark for new and existing recruitment agencies to work to.

## Working Together

Agency and employers need to create consistent and better working relationships of trust. Agencies need to understand exactly what demands are being made by employers and work with employers to meet these needs effectively. It also requires employers to give recruitment consultancies their time in building effective relationships and understanding. Together they need to give the new and existing workforce the opportunity to develop a career in Social Care Work. A lot of team work is required to help improve the bigger picture and to challenge the shortfalls of the Social Care Workforce and by creating a culture of unity may just make the difference it needs.

*Shaida works for Fulbridge Social Care. If you require information or guidance on any aspect of your recruitment strategies or process (i.e. immigration, CRB checks, vetting or training) or perhaps require help in finding the right people; please contact us on 01733 703214/703213 or alternatively email us on info@fulbridgesocialcare.co.uk*

# NCERCC View

## Nessa says - Starter for ten? Crystal!

Anyone in Residential Child Care ever been on University Challenge? A few weeks ago the press was full of the intellectual whirlwind from Corpus Christi answering all the questions. There were discussions later about 'crystallised' and 'fluid' intelligence. Crystallised intelligence is knowledge you have learnt and then access from memory. Fluid intelligence is analysis and problem solving.

A few days later an interesting publication came to NCERCC eyes from DEMOS, a think-tank interested in ideas that could empower people to shape their own lives. The report is called 'A constitution for social care' <http://www.demos.co.uk/publications/socialcareconstitution> It is focused on older people but what it has to say is relevant for young people too and NCERCC wondered why there was not someone somewhere, maybe like ICHA and other associated organisations, asking these questions and having the answers in crystal and fluid forms.

The preamble says boldly 'Social care remains poorly understood, undervalued and underfunded...social care is an essential service... care is rationed ...only those ...with the most critical needs and fewest personal resources ...leaves hundreds without the support they need...'

We can hear the voices saying as they read, 'This much we know for the young people's residential sector across England too'. And other voices join in, 'Many have been saying this for decades'.

What was different with the DEMOS approach was that they were proposing 'A Constitution for Social Care.' This set NCERCC thinking about what the sector has been saying and has not been saying.

## Residential Care - A Positive Choice

Did the 20th anniversary of the Wagner report pass you by last year? Its very title, 'Residential Care - A Positive Choice' sought to shift the emphasis away from the view that residential care is the 'last resort' and to value its role as a vital part of community care. The Wagner Report was published at a time when the debate concerning the future of both residential and community care was being widely discussed and these discussions are here again. There was little acknowledgement of the anniversary maybe because much of what was said then could still be said now? It is interesting that NCERCC cannot find a weblink to this document.

So for an example of crystal and fluid thinking let's look at the 2007 SIRCC publication 'No time to lose: a manifesto for children and young people looked after away from home'. [http://www.sircc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Manifesto\\_of\\_looked\\_after\\_children.pdf](http://www.sircc.org.uk/sites/default/files/Manifesto_of_looked_after_children.pdf) It carried a foreword from the Scottish Commissioner for Children and Young People and was supported by a range of children's organisations. The challenges were identified and a summary of recommendations were made that could lead to a national strategy.

Isn't this already in Care Matters we hear you say? Residential Child Care is more prominent with positives in early drafts. The sector have told NCERCC that they were disappointed with the later stages as it is talked about residential life relatively little and almost all in administrative, negative or research terms.

## Nessa, Gavin and Stacey and Care Matters

But Care Matters is not the end of the book. It was only chapter one. Chapter two is the Children and Young People's Act. The implementation planning is now underway and an important aspect is the definition of the 'general duty of the local authority to secure sufficient accommodation for looked after children.'

Here, Nessa from Gavin and Stacey stepped forward into the NCERCC consciousness with her catch phrase, 'Crystal' – now is the time for the sector to offer its knowledge and memory. And one better than Nessa, 'Fluid' - analysing and problem solving with ideas for a national residential strategy that will bring together all of the local authorities audits of needs and placement activity leading to an evidenced-based regional planning to a national strategy.

So what might be the foundations to such a 'crystal' and 'fluid' strategy? Here's ten things offered from NCERCC to get the sector thinking started.

1. Most people's personal life rarely affords an experience never mind an insight into young people with extreme life events as part of their history. Nearly all of them come with an idea of Residential Child Care as though it were one thing. So let's start by saying 'There is no one thing we can now call Residential Child Care in the singular only Residential Child Care in the plural'.
2. Others come asking questions with ideas of how Residential Child Care may have been at one time – as institutions. Those days are passed and it is now a sector that needs to be involved with highly specialised provision for meeting highly specialised needs.
3. Most children's homes now have less than 5 children living there and there are 130 registered homes for one child. For some children, living with a group of other children is not the best way in which to meet their needs. They need to have the opportunity to have the specialist support that residential child care can provide, but without the complexities that group living might bring.
4. There are about 45,000 Children in Care at any one time. Nearly half of these children return home to their families within six months of being in care. Research tells us that where a child is in care longer than one month the likelihood of the stay being lengthy increases. The ones who come to residential living have more complex needs and so are likely to need to stay for a few years at least.

5. 92% of children's homes are satisfactory or better and two thirds are good or outstanding at their most recent inspections.
6. Not only Local Authorities provide Residential Child Care – 65% is private, 30% is local authority, 5% is voluntary.
7. Report after report tell us that young people like children's homes and that they felt cared for and looked after. Some children feel that the children's home that they live in is exactly where they want to be. It is fair to say that some children do not like living in residential care.
8. Sometimes there may not be a placement that meets the child's specific needs close to their family home. At other times there may be child protection reasons why a child should not live near their family. For yet more young people the placement needs to take account of the emotional needs. In order to feel safe they need to be geographically further away to allow them to start recovery.
9. Residential Child Care can be a positive choice: providing stability and a stimulating environment; widening cultural and educational horizons.
10. Residential Child Care can create a framework for emotionally secure relationships with adults and some young people benefit from having a number of carers. Residential Child Care can provide a setting for intensive therapeutic work.

## 'Crystal?' Thanks Nessa.

### Jonathan Stanley

#### New Members

Welcome to new ICHA Members

#### Amberleigh

Wales

#### Appletree

Cumbria

#### Footsteps a path to change

Staffordshire

#### Key Change

Cumbria

#### Mulberry Bush

Oxon

#### New Forest Care

Southampton

#### Tulip Care

Essex

#### Zenith

Gloucestershire