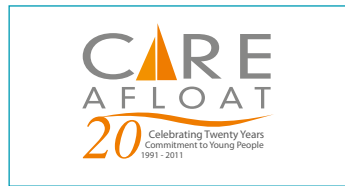
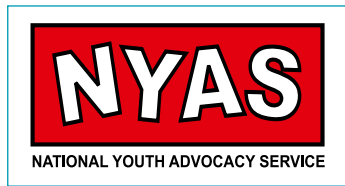


Independent Children's Homes Association
Representing & Supporting Registered Providers

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Hello and welcome to the Spring 2011 edition of the ICHA Newsletter

Firstly as a new Co-Chair I would like to pay tribute to Paul O'Leary and Pauline Webster who have recently stepped down as Co-Chairs. On everyone's behalf I would like to thank them both for their work in support of ICHA over the last two years. I know they will continue to work hard on your behalf as committee members.

Never has there been a time of greater need for our association. Inevitably minds are focused on immediate issues around the financial situation, a new Ofsted Framework, revised National Minimum Standards for Children's Homes and the national contract review. However we must constantly remind everyone in this process that there are vulnerable children at the heart of all this, and we are here for them, not "the system".

It may not be immediately in your sights but the government green paper on the future of special educational needs may be of interest because of the proposal to reform the old system of statementing and to create a new single assessment process and Education, Health and Care Plan in which all services will work with the family to produce a single plan, reviewed regularly. This has the same statutory protection as a statement of SEN, and those involved will commit to providing services. If this heralds a truly tri-partite system this can only benefit the disadvantaged children we work with. Despite governmental efforts to create Children's Services, they have not all been as coherent as intended.

The Outstanding Children's Homes report from Ofsted has to be an inspiration to us all and indeed there is some excellent practical material in there, but we must also be seeking and celebrating innovative and creative practice amongst our members that can be shared irrespective of the quest for the outstanding label. We should remember that a great deal of today's "accepted" practice was once the domain of pioneer workers in residential child care. We need to rekindle that pioneer spirit once more and rekindle an understanding in others that such work is crucial.

It is critical, particularly in difficult times, that the association should have a recognized national voice and that is why the 2011 ICHA Strategic Development plan is focused around the following areas:

- Influencing the national agenda
- Promoting quality child care practice
- Keeping members connected and informed

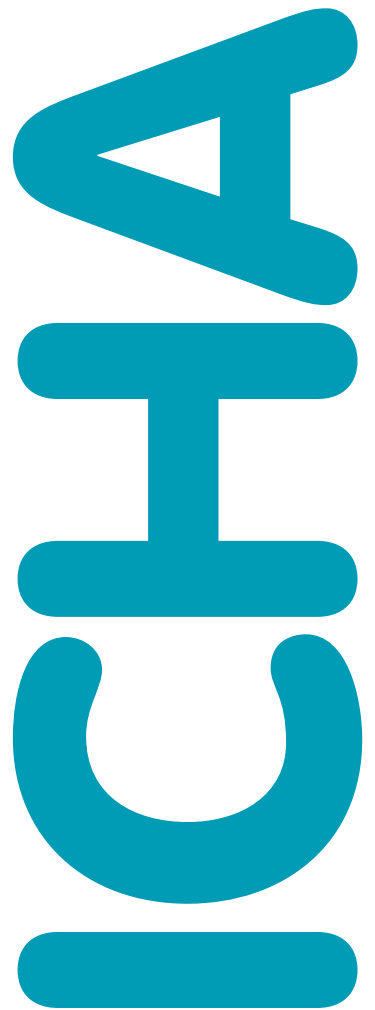
ICHA will continue to support providers but the association needs you as members to support it. We need additional committee members to ensure that discussion is broad based and even more representative of the range of providers out there. Join us whether you are a new or old member in maintaining the important service we offer.

Steve Lord
Director Specialist Education Services and Co-Chair, ICHA

Welcome to new ICHA Members

EAM House Children's Respite Home – Warrington;
Care Tech Children's Services – Stoke-on-Trent;
Stepping Stones Care Services – Vale of Glamorgan;
Evolution Children's Services – Newcastle-upon-Tyne;
Cherry Cottage – Wigan; Artemis Support Ltd. – Newcastle-upon-Tyne; Good Foundations Ltd. – Merseyside; Acorn Care and Education Ltd. – Bolton; Priority Childcare – Merthyr Tydfil; Time Out Children's Homes – Ripponden.

ICHA has 88 members currently, representing 461 homes and 1503 beds!



Diary dates

26th May, 10am
Committee Meeting
St Mary & St John's, Erdington, Birmingham

16th June, 10am
General Meeting
Royal Court Hotel, Coventry

14th July, 10am
Committee Meeting
Thoughts of Others, Birmingham

22nd September, 10am
Committee Meeting
Thoughts of Others, Birmingham

29 September, 1.30pm
WICHA Meeting
Branas Isaf, Llys Edeyrnion Business Centre, London Road, Corwen, Denbighshire, LL21 0DB

20th October, 10am
General Meeting
Venue to be arranged

17th November, 10am
Committee Meeting
Thoughts of Others, Birmingham

Cuts and Commissioning – a solicitor's view

We are now entering the next stage of uncertainty in the provision for frontline services by Local Authorities. My hope that front line services would escape relatively unscathed has been dashed. It seems from what I have gleaned that frontline services will be stretched. In at least one county, child mental health services will be scaled back considerably and several resources closed.

In other areas, Local Authorities are seriously contemplating outsourcing fostering and residential provision. Within children's services, I expect that middle management will be under threat by reducing the number of team managers and even commissioning teams.

No one knows how long the austerity measures will last before there is some loosening of the purse strings. Sooner or later things will get better. I will argue that in the face of present adversity there are in fact a number of positives.

On a practical level I foresee that:

1. New relationships will be forged with commissioners because some of them will lose their jobs.
2. There is an appetite that costs be reduced.
3. Some authorities are keen that where services are purchased in the private sector, children should remain in the local authority geographical area or at least close to the boundary.
4. Block purchasing is likely to increase. Tendering will be high on the agenda for controlling costs by Local Authorities.
5. Smaller private sector providers will be vulnerable.

The above applies equally to residential care and fostering.

I have little comfort to offer you. Burying one's corporate head in the sand is not an option. However, the prospect of an increase in outsourcing work presents business opportunities.

Collaboration between providers may well be necessary to bid for block purchasing. Collaboration could provide a more attractive option for providers, both on cost and services. It presents providers with the option to bid for work that may be beyond their skills and capacity. The prospect of securing an agreed number of placements will guarantee some cash flow.

The potential to collaborate may enable some companies to tender for work that they would not otherwise qualify for. An example is if the tender requires the provision of services within a defined geographical area.

I have advocated for some time that if there is to be pressure to reduce prices, the quid pro quo is the certainty of supply or a change, i.e. reduction, in services to be provided within the basic price. The likely loss or shrinkage in the public sector of therapeutic provision is a good example of where you could charge additional fees. If a child's care plan recommends or requires therapeutic help, it is difficult to see how one can ignore providing such provision. It will be part of the Local Authority's statutory responsibility, the most obvious example being a child placed under a care order. Thus, the cost should be met by the authority. Secondly, failure to provide the service exposes the provider (not the Local Authority) to an adverse Ofsted inspection. This is not a moral argument, it is a contractual one.

There are some business tips that may help. Irrespective of costs, I recommend that you look at the payment terms being offered by you under your contract. Most that I have seen have 30 days grace to pay the invoice that is raised. How often is that honoured? Do you charge interest on late payment? Think about a review.

How many of you factor your invoices? Cash is king. However, are there alternatives? Can you secure commercial lending that would enable you to recover your own fees at a lower cost?

I appreciate that no one can guarantee that the number of beds available in the private sector will remain the same or that prices will not fall. If the private sector is to be viable in the long term, as a vehicle for providing care and fostering, it has to have an equal contractual relationship with local authorities. We should keep in mind that you are providing a frontline and vital service for local authorities. Far be it for them to dictate the terms upon which that service is provided. The public sector needs you to help it balance its budgets. A financial squeeze on you could result in company failure leaving even more demand for the finite number of beds available.

Local Authorities are still subject to scrutiny in acting reasonably and proportionately in determining what services are outsourced and the terms and conditions of such services. Whilst I suspect that the courts will be sympathetic to the limited resources argument local authorities will deploy, it is neither a cast iron defence nor an excuse to seek to impose contracts at an unreasonable low remuneration rates.

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

Ofsted View: New framework for the inspection of children's homes

From 1 April 2011, Ofsted will use its new framework to inspect children's homes in England.

The framework focuses inspection on the quality and impact of services and the outcomes achieved for children and young people. It takes into account the new Children's Homes Regulations and National Minimum Standards that have been issued by the Department for Education.

To strengthen the approach to inspections, all children's homes inspections will be unannounced. This is in response to what children had said during consultation and will ensure that inspectors see the homes as they really are.

Developed through consultation with key professionals and groups of children and young people, the framework has been tested through a series of pilot inspections and full inspections in the period up to February 2011.

We held a number of events in March 2011 to explain the details of the new framework to providers and commissioners, and to provide an opportunity to respond to any questions.

To view the *Framework for the inspection of children's homes*, visit: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100195

To read the *Evaluation schedule for the inspection of children's homes*, visit: www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications/100193



Support in troubled times – services from NYAS

Public spending cuts have been affecting providers of services to local authorities for some time. NYAS, the National Youth Advocacy Service, has been working with local authorities over the past 12 – 18 months who have requested savings in current contracts of anywhere from 5 to 20 per cent. 'In each case', states Claire Hyde Assistant CEO for NYAS Children's Services, 'we have had to look critically at what we can and cannot provide for the monies available in order to maintain the quality of provision.'

As the cuts start to really take hold, it is of growing concern that the most complex and vulnerable of children and young people will suffer. Partly in response to this, NYAS has in recent months extended its Legal Services to provide a comprehensive range of legal support, advice and representation for children and young people in addition to vulnerable adults. 'What is of prime concern to NYAS as a rights based organisation is that in these times of real change and uncertainty, we need to ensure that any impact of services to the detriment of the most vulnerable children and young people are addressed. Involving a solicitor in supporting a young person does not mean that the approach will be adversarial. We need to be working with local authorities helping them to resolve issues and identify shortfalls in service delivery so that they can also use this information constructively with central government. Where concerns are raised about poor practice, good local authorities

want to know so that they can improve. If ever there was a moment to be concerned about the safety and welfare of children and young people, this does appear to be it,' added Claire.

An example of the legal support NYAS can offer is that of a young person, 'T', who was a 16 year old child living in an unstable, unsuitable accommodation for approximately 11 months. T told NYAS that he wanted somewhere stable to live, so that he could concentrate on obtaining qualifications to become a qualified mechanic. As a young child T had witnessed several significant incidents of domestic violence between his mother and father. His parents subsequently separated and T's mother asked T to leave after he became violent towards her and his siblings. He then moved in with his father who was a drug addict and regularly witnessed him taking drugs. T eventually became involved with drugs and this led to his behaviour becoming more aggressive. He began offending and spent time sleeping on the streets. Despite being aware of T's situation the local authority refused to provide T with accommodation and support services. T's circumstances and the local authority's refusal to assist had a negative impact on T's state of mind and he attempted to take his own life. NYAS contacted the local authority to remind it of its statutory duties towards T and to give notice that if T was not adequately supported and provided with suitable accommodation NYAS would challenge the LA's failure by way of Judicial Review. T was provided

with suitable accommodation and the local authority undertook assessments in order to arrange a suitable package of support.

NYAS Children's Services provide rights based services to children, young people and some vulnerable adults to 54 local authorities across England and Wales. They provide advocacy to independent children's homes and have specialisms in mental health and disability. They also provide Independent Visitors, regulation 33 visitors and Independent Persons for the purposes of secure reviews and complaints.

It is not necessary to have a NYAS advocate in order to get support from a NYAS solicitor. NYAS will provide legal support across England and Wales wherever the child/ young person is. Examples of the kinds of issues we support: children and young people with are changes of placement, transition, leaving care, contact, education, local authority complaints and bullying. Carers can contact NYAS on behalf of the child or young person. NYAS has agreed to send to all ICHA members information about legal advice and support. They can also be contacted via the NYAS helpline on 0800 616 101 or main@nyas.net.

Claire Hyde
Assistant Chief Executive, National Youth
Advocacy Service

ICHA and the National Contract – Statement

The national body representing independent children's homes (Independent Children's Homes Association - ICHA) has decided that it cannot support the revised national contract for placement of children and young people. ICHA proposes retaining the current contract until agreement is reached on a new version and has also urged the Children's Minister Tim Loughton to investigate the issue.

ICHA Co-Chair Steve Lord said: "The ICHA will continue to participate in discussions in order to establish a truly National Contract that is used consistently in England. It is deeply disappointing that over 3 years after the launch of the original national contract, which our members believed would provide consistency and a 'level playing field', local and regional variations have emerged.

The new version, springing from disagreement between commissioners about the old one, has changed fundamental clauses particularly around termination of placements and notice periods. ICHA members believe they are potentially detrimental to the vulnerable young people who should be at the heart of the process. Although there is provision for proposing amendments, it puts the onus on already over-encumbered providers to propose these alterations and potentially further detracts from the relational discussions around

planning for young people. ICHA members believe that the changes are contrary to promoting an environment that protects the interests of vulnerable children and young people and cannot endorse its use.

ICHA has data from parliamentary questions showing that at the year ending 31st March 2009 there were 1200 children and young people in England with between 5 and 9 placement moves in the year and 150 with 10 or more placement moves. At 31st March 2010 the figures for 10+ had dipped slightly to 130 young people but the figure for those with between 5 and 9 placement moves remained static at 1200.

It is no wonder that educational achievement for young people in care is significantly lower than peers who grow up in their own families. How can anyone who moves home more than 5 times in one year possibly attain stability and become successfully integrated into any school? It is time the sector pulled together to identify those children and young people who persistently fall through gaps in the system.

The ICHA cannot support a National Contract that supports poor decision-making through enabling termination of placements at short or no notice and further disadvantages the most vulnerable young people in our system.



The new contract spurns good evidenced-based residential child care on which the previous one was constructed. We remain supportive of a national contract designed to ensure the best provision and protection of young people that also enables providers to offer a quality, and importantly, sustainable service. None is possible if you severely disadvantage children's homes as does the proposed revision.

We cannot go on with young people having more than 5 placements in a year before finding somewhere to belong. In these early days of the new guidance for Care Planning and Independent Reviewing Officers we cannot go with the need for cheapness bringing an end to a stable placement."

Quality practice in Residential Care

We continue to highlight areas of quality practice within the ICHA Membership. This edition, we focus on Care Afloat.

Care Afloat- A pro-active response to abuse

“Good quality residential care is not just about what happens in the home. It is also about how we work with key partners, including the Family, Police and Local Authority, to ensure the best possible outcomes for young people.

Residential care can be part of a constructive approach to a return home.”

Danny Curran, Director /Founder Care Afloat.

Mary's Tale

“We only need a placement for 28 days, we've just got to meet the criteria for a secure welfare order and we haven't tried a private residential home”

This is what we were told when Mary was referred. At that time the Local Authority felt that a secure welfare order was the only way to keep the young person safe.

Mary, a 14 year old girl, was missing from home regularly. There were grave concerns around sexual exploitation by a much older male “Y” who she claimed to be her boyfriend. There were also concerns about her drug abuse.

Mary had gone from an A grade student to complete non attendance in 12 months and at the time of referral she had been missing for a long period of time, and a press release was pending.

Care Afloat agreed to help.

Armed with a photograph of Mary, our staff team began searching the areas she was believed to be associating in, and following a series of enquiries found an address we believed she may be at. Working in partnership with the police, Mary was located and we bought her back to the home. She was now pregnant, and in her eyes excited at the prospect of setting up home with “Y”.

In the initial stages of placement Mary was extremely reluctant to engage, and despite robust safeguarding measures in place she continued to abscond. The emotional manipulation that Mary had been subjected to had clearly left her very confused, vulnerable and at significant risk. She genuinely could not understand why people were so concerned. On each occasion that she absconded the staff team would search, find and return Mary, using every opportunity available to engage her, to complete work with her regarding exploitation and to raise her life aspirations and self esteem.

Persistence and patience was essential. Alongside working with Mary, we began working together with her parents, her placing authority and the police, to ensure that positive action was taken against the male who had exploited her (and pertinent others). Subsequently the male was arrested and held in custody awaiting trial.

Staff began working with Mary, helping her to explore her perception of what had been happening. Whilst of course all the professionals were right that Mary had been a victim of sexual exploitation, clearly we had to work at helping Mary herself understand this, if her vulnerability to exploitation was to decrease. Both Mary's and her unborn baby's future were dependant on this. Alongside supporting her to emotionally break her tie to “Y”, Mary required high levels of emotional and indeed practical support during her pregnancy.

Over a period of several months we worked closely with Mary's mum, taking tentative steps to begin with, to rebuild their relationship. Mary returned to education via Care Afloat; she began having some age appropriate experiences and fun, with the biggest breakthrough being when Mary herself chose to give a statement to the Crown Prosecution Service against “Y”.

From a young person who was about to be 'secured', after numerous assessments and discussions the permanency plan became for her to move to a foster home closer to her Mum, and all being well for her and her Baby to return home 6 months later.

We were obviously supportive of this move throughout and Mary eventually moved on, with continuing contact and support from us.

Twelve months ago we met up with Mary, her son and her Mum. She was now living at home, her son was thriving.

Even now she still keeps in touch regularly and recently attended a party at our home to visit old friends.

The family continue to do well and Mary is now training to be a Probation Officer and says she wants to help give other people the chance to turn their life around, even when the odds are stacked against them as they had been with her.

The following extract has been taken from a card we received from Mary's mum a few weeks into her placement with us. Not only did it help keep us motivated during all the late nights, but when we last met with Mary we showed this to her.

“I can't thank you enough for all the care, attention and support offered to Mary and to myself during these past weeks. You are safeguarding her to the best of your ability and for probably the first time in the last 12months I feel that I'm not alone in attempting to do the same. My utmost respect and thanks “

To hear Mary, now a mother herself reflecting upon her own experiences and of how positive her life was now, reminded us not only of the importance of never giving up on a young person, but how a secure welfare order should never be the only option considered, but a very last resort. Moreover it reminded us of the proactive and positive role/ services that private residential services can provide!

The name of the young person involved has been changed to protect her confidentiality.

Residential Child Care

If you want to share some of your good work with your colleagues, please let us know and we will consider it for the next Newsletter!

Mark's Story

Mark was referred to Care Afloat at an extremely difficult time in his life. He was in a secure hospital with a diagnosis of drug induced psychosis, with a wide range of extreme emotional and behavioural difficulties. Mark had a history of violent criminal offences, and was categorised as high risk within MAPP (multi agency public protection arrangement).

Whilst in the hospital Mark had assaulted staff members and caused criminal damage, leading to the hospital being unable or unwilling to continue his placement there. The youth offending team were recommending a custodial sentence and there was a high probability that this would be the outcome at the pending court hearing.

Care Afloat put together a package of care that would include an educational placement with therapeutic input, to present to the court, in an attempt to avoid this course of action. This was successful and it was agreed that Mark would have a placement within Care Afloat.

After a manager's assessment it was concluded that, whilst it was recognised that Mark would eventually benefit from sharing a home with other young people to enable him to develop the social skills needed for future stability, it was not suitable for him to share with other young people at that time.

Our plan included him spending some time in a remote area to allow him a period of stability, with time and space to build positive relationships with the staff team, with limited access to negative outside influences.

Mark spent his initial 28 days with Care Afloat in a solo respite placement in a rural area on our Mobile provision which can operate anywhere in the country. During this time he worked with the staff team who would eventually care for him to ensure consistency when he moved to a community based home. The staff team were highly trained and experienced in managing challenging behaviours; they worked with Mark to rebuild his confidence and self esteem, and look at his offending behaviours.

He was introduced to Care Afloat's Learn 4 Life School on a daily basis, to study for GCSE's and an Asdan qualification.

He settled in well and started to establish the relationships with us that would become the bedrock of his future.

At the end of the 28 days, Mark moved into a small community based home and resided

there for a period of 12 months. During this time the team continued to work with him with a multi disciplinary approach, including services and support from the Psychologist from the Community Homes Health Team, Youth Offending Team, MAPP and Ad Action (drugs and alcohol councillor).

We worked on the philosophy of unconditional positive regard to enable Mark to increase his self worth by understanding that it was not he as a person that was inappropriate or unacceptable, but only his behaviours.

Mark was encouraged to discuss situations that caused him to be angry, and was provided with strategies to aid him to manage this anger.

He was offered a wide range of activities, and his ability in music was promoted. This became the key to working with this young person to enable him to express himself in the form of music.

Included in this package was a place within a music studio and very quickly it became apparent that he had a natural gift in this area, in particular with writing lyrics and recording CD's.

Throughout the next 12 months, he thrived in this environment, and each time he reached a crisis point, staff supported him with patience and understanding, to enable him to find his way back into a positive place. Mark did have occasions when he committed further criminal offences, and each time, a manager attended the court with a positive report, advocating avoidance of a custodial sentence for Mark.

In difficult times, when he refused to attend school, tutors visited him at the home and provided education.

During the 12 month period at the home, observation and assessment indicated that Mark was struggling to meet targets set to enable him have a successful transition to independence ;evidence suggested that this was being obstructed by the fact that he was sharing a home with other young people.

In several multi agency meetings, and in consultation with Mark and his Local Authority, it was decided that he would benefit from a community based solo home, starting with a 2-1 staffing ratio , and over a period of time reducing this to 1-1 staffing. This would provide him with the opportunity to develop the life skills needed, without the negative influence of other young people.

After several pre placement visits he moved to one of our community based solo homes ; he continued to attend Learn for Life school and the music studios.

The intervention worked .Consistency and stability were key elements.

In 2010 ,he gained 3 GCSE's, an Arts Council Silver award for Music Technology, an ASDAN Sports award and a number of AQAs.

Mark thrived so well in his music that he was given an apprenticeship at the studio; understandably he had difficulty with this in the initial stages, but the staff team continued to work with him, offering encouragement and support, until he eventually gained the skills needed to attend work, and engage appropriately once there. Last Christmas he gave a public performance with his band at Care Afloat's own Christmas Party.

Mark has now moved into semi independence with an outreach package provided by his staff team, to ensure he has the consistency and support needed to enable him to thrive. He is struggling with this, but with his excellent confidence and self esteem, we now hope that he has the skills needed to live independently, and with continuing support, face the difficult times ahead and live in the community without risk to others or himself.

Whatever happens, we will continue to support and encourage him!



Talk Don't Walk: A Specialist Project Supporting Young Runaways

The Relationships Centre has delivered the Talk Don't Walk project in Warrington since 2004. The project has consistently delivered a multi agency preventative service for young people their families or carers where emotional issues in their relationships result in the young person running away from home or care. Over 100,000 young people run away from home each year and 25,000 of these are harmed or involved in risky behaviours, become victims of crime or are sexually exploited.

Talk Don't Walk's success has been measured not just in financial savings but more importantly in the lasting changes it has brought to the young people, their families and the community in which they live. The project demonstrates intergenerational change as well as increased awareness of young people, around the dangers of running away, and offers positive alternative responses to their experiences. The difference with Talk Don't Walk in comparison to similar services is that it helps young people:

- **Reconnect** with themselves, developing a sense of purpose and direction, educating young people about their own and others emotions and solidifying their own sense of self. Being able to reconnect with themselves and examine their personal heritage creates a massive shift in their empowerment.
- By **refocusing** their thoughts, feelings and beliefs they are able to begin to overcome the anxieties they currently face and with the support of their worker are able to learn how to express themselves in a way which makes them feel heard and understood which, in turn alleviates the desire to run away from their difficult emotions.
- This work is carried out in conjunction with other family members (or foster parents) to support them in learning these essential life skills and in so doing young people are able to **rebalance** their lives and work towards the positive futures they deserve.

Reduce the risk

The risks to young people who run away or go missing increases significantly the longer they remain unreported; the importance of swift reporting to the proper authorities cannot be stressed enough. Talk Don't Walk work closely alongside the police and social care to gather intelligence and ensure further risks are reduced.

One of the greatest fears that parents, carers or guardians can experience comes when they discover that their child is missing or has run away. Parents and carers will experience a range of emotions. The stress of the situation and the different ways in which parents, family, friends and police respond can reach crisis proportions and create further crisis within the home.

Here at Talk Don't Walk, we help to reduce the risk of a young person becoming a run away, or if they have already run away, develop strategies and implement support packages for all involved to reduce the risk of repeat running. We work



with the young runaway, their family or carers and any one else involved to establish why they run and how we can prevent things from reaching crisis point in the future.

What factors make a young person run away?

- To avoid an emotional experience or consequence that they are expecting in some future encounter or situation.
 - To escape a recurrent or ongoing unpleasant, painful or difficult experience in their life.
 - To avoid the loss of activities, relationships or friendships that are considered important or worthwhile.
 - To be with other young people who are supportive, encouraging and active (this support can often appear positive to them but may have very negative consequences in the long run).
 - To be with others or go to places which are a distraction, away from other problems in their life.
 - To change or stop what they feel they have to do.
 - Transference of difficult emotions from past relationships into a current relationship
- Many young people in care run away, in the last quarter 36% of referrals to Talk Don't Walk were young people in looked after care. When we engage with these young people we maintain a consistent, unconditional and non-judgmental relationship which helps to reassure them and build the necessary trust in order for us to help them make positive changes in their lives.

Making changes

Talk Don't Walk provides a safe and trusting environment for young people and their parents/guardians to explore the difficulties they may be experiencing. Making young people feel valued, heard and understood is a major step towards supporting them in overcoming whatever difficulties they are currently experiencing. Talk Don't Walk's specialist knowledge in the field has brought national attention; being featured as

best practice example in the National Runaways strategy.

Talk Don't Walk recognises that behaviour stems not only from difficult experiences but from unhelpful thinking and difficult emotions which need to be addressed. Practical advice and guidance to parents and guardians helps to supplement the direct work with young people which can include therapeutic interventions such as counselling and cognitive behavioural therapy. In many cases family mediation is also useful in providing a safe space to discuss issues, agree boundaries and reach compromises.

Many of the young people in care that have been referred to the project have dissociated from their own feelings and claim that they feel empty; under the emptiness are usually layers of guilt, fear, anger, boredom - compounded by beliefs of unworthiness and loss of identity.

A large part of the work we do is preventative and we regularly carry out awareness raising workshops within schools as part of our approach delivering sessions on Personal Safety, Self Esteem, Conflict Resolution and Healthy Relationships, essential topics which young people need to be aware of in order to better deal with their life experiences and be able to make informed decisions and understand their behaviour.

In addition to the support we provide to young people, parents and guardians we offer consultancy to professionals and deliver various training packages focussing on behaviour management, the impact of unhealthy relationships and regularly attend strategic partnership meetings to ensure that the right support for young runaways is given at the right time.

If you would like to discuss any of the work at The Relationships Centre you can contact us via our website www.therelationshipscentre.co.uk or ring Stephen Leach or Pam Arnold on 01925 246 910.

These brief extracts from long reports offer a rich policy agenda. There is also an increasing interest in how other countries carry out their duties to looked after children.

The Children's Minister Tim Loughton has described a "particularly impressive children's home" in Denmark with children from under 10 right up to 22 who "were looked after by fantastic pedagogical social workers from whom we in this country have a lot to learn. Those social workers develop a great empathy with the children and are seen as friends and confidantes as well as being the children's guardians. The children there are not encapsulated in a children's home and cut off from the outside world. Each week, there is a dinner evening to which relatives are invited—perhaps the birth parents or other members of the extended family—to spend as normal a meal time as possible with the child or other residents of the children's home. The children may spend weekends back at home or with an extended family member. There is a degree of flexibility."

Our experience and research indicates that their homes operate in a completely different context. The Danish model cannot simply be exported but we want to establish what can be learnt without obscuring home-grown best practice that should be expanded.

The bad news is the parlous plight of our sector. A recent straw poll at an exceptionally well-attended general meeting concluded that many providers face dramatically reduced or no referrals, mainly on financial not care grounds. Half of the providers are concerned about the viability of their homes if present market conditions prevail.

The sector needs a level playing field where the quality of care is honestly reflected in the fees and improved relations with local authority bodies to sustain a stable market.

The residential sector is unlike most markets where the state can be largely indifferent. The loss of able and experienced staff is damaging for all concerned. Once gone, it is hard to recreate and leaves inexperienced practitioners.

This makes it extremely difficult for policy-makers to tackle the now widely shared belief that expenditure in residential care as a first resort, where appropriate, can avert higher long-term costs by curbing the cascade of social problems.

The ICHA is urging interested parliamentarians to visit our homes to see our work for themselves. We hope that this is the beginning of a journey that aims to radically improve the position of looked after children.

New Regulations affecting Children's Homes

The amended Children's Homes Regulations and National Minimum Standards have now been published. The amendments partly incorporate changes that have occurred since the Regulations and NMS were first published, in 2001; but there are some new clauses that home's managers should take account of. However, there is a much wider agenda that home's managers should consider; partly resulting from other Regulations coming into force in April, and partly from the coalition governments policy agenda.

Of all the other Regulations coming into force in April, The Care Planning, Placement and Case Review (England) Regulations will impact most significantly upon homes; and managers are recommended to familiarise themselves and their staff with these Regulations and take account of them in their procedures and training.

Some of the key new requirements in the 'Care Planning' Regulations are:

- The timescales for convening Looked After Reviews and the circumstances when additional Reviews may be convened have changed e.g. the first Review must be convened within 20 (not 28) days of a child becoming Looked After, and a Looked After Review should be convened before a decision is taken to cease looking after a child.
- A significantly extended role for Independent Reviewing Officers (IROs) giving them a more effective and independent oversight of children's cases e.g. monitoring a child's case on an ongoing basis including whether any safeguarding issues arise; and a duty to identify any areas of poor practice, including general concerns around service delivery (not

just around individual children).

- IROs must be consulted before placements are made outside the placing authority, before a placement changes and if a child is persistently absent or missing. This new role is reflected in the new NMS for Children's Homes, in that, home's managers have a duty to keep the IRO updated on progress that children are making and children have a right to contact their IRO if they are concerned.
- There is a new requirement that Care Plans must be prepared prior to a child's first placement, or, if it is not practicable to do so, within 10 working days of the child's first placement; and Placement Information Records must be completed by the child's social worker within 5 working days of the child being placed, with a copy being forwarded to the home.
- Previously, there was no statutory requirement for social workers to visit children in Children's Homes; the new Care Planning Regulations rectify this and the frequency for visits has been changed.

In relation to the amended Children's Homes Regulations and NMS, the following key changes have been made:

- The Standards have been completely reorganised, none of the previous Standards have been retained.
- The Regulations and Standards in relation to Short Breaks now permit children to be accommodated on a non Looked After basis, under Section 17 of the Children Act 1989.
- Policies and procedures relating to unauthorised absence and missing children will need to be amended; home's are now required to have a 'missing children' policy and to ensure their procedures comply

with local authority protocols in relation to 'Runaway and Missing from Home and Care'. Regulation 30 (Schedule 5) has been amended in that there is no longer a requirement to notify the placing authority if a child absconds.

- The requirements in relation to recording of incidents and sanctions are not as prescriptive as they were and home's managers are now able to use electronic records – there is no reference to the need for bound and numbered books.
- There are some interesting deletions in the Regulations in regard to records and files e.g. home's no longer need to keep log books.
- In the light of the various amended Regulations and new Standards, home's managers will need to review and revise their Statements of Purpose as well as their Policies and Procedures.
- There are a number of new requirements in relation to training e.g. that staff receive training on health promotion and communicable diseases, safe care practices including skills to care for children who have been abused.
- In relation to the use of physical intervention, staff may only use techniques that are approved by the home and there is now a clear requirement that such training is regularly refreshed.

For a more detailed briefing of the changes emanating from these and other Regulations coming into force in April, contact Claire Maslen on 02476 678053 or go to our website www.trixonline.co.uk and follow links for News/Policy Briefings – these briefings are freely available to all.

Political Report

Making the case for and with looked after children

Political Officer Gary Kent seeks to give an overview of the political context of the work of the ICHA in a paper that has been endorsed by the ICHA as a guide to its work.

Looked after children are usually overlooked until tragedy prompts policy-makers to promise "never again." Reports are commissioned, some changes are made and the media moves on but the underlying plight of looked after children then returns to its low place on the political agenda.

Society acts as a corporate parent for these young people and we should treat them as most would treat our own. The simple question is "would we accept this for our own children?" Asking the question sometimes answers it.

Most looked after children are adopted or fostered but a small minority of about 12% have exceptional needs as victims of severe trauma, abuse and neglect. They require residential care to contain and modify their behaviour and enable recovery from harm. Some require higher degrees of therapeutic support.

This is more expensive than relatively straightforward options given high staff ratios, purpose-built or adapted environments and other overheads.

Placing such children inappropriately compromises their needs and life-chances. Some local authority commissioners, under pressure from central government cuts, are demanding substantial fee reductions but this will further compromise quality.

Scrimping on residential care aggravates matters and at continuing public expense through educational underachievement, higher custodial rates, mental illness and alcohol and drug abuse.

Most residential care is provided by small and medium sized homes which form most of the membership of the Independent Children's Homes Association (ICHA) - the main representative body.

Our members seek to highlight the views and voices of looked after children in public debate. They run small businesses but they are not just companies with their eye on the bottom line or the "warehousing" of children. Our members cannot treat the children with whom they live cheek by jowl as commodities. Nor should society.

Many ICHA members established independent or voluntary organisations because the municipal model discouraged pioneering new methods of improving children's life chances. We also focus on policy and co-operation with like-minded groups and individuals as well as the specific needs of our sector.

The Ofsted annual report shows that 75% of children's homes are good or better and 95% satisfactory or better. The rest are inadequate. We work to spread best practice to all homes which, if they don't make the grade, should not be in business.

Mike Lindsay, Head of Advice at the Office of the Children's Rights Director recently told a meeting in Parliament: "what is wrong with residential care is our obsession that something is wrong with residential care."

We should never accept second best for these children and young people but the figures make grim reading. The CSJ think tank notes that care leavers account for less than 1% of the population but are 4-5 times more likely to have mental health issues. A third of homeless people, 30% of children in custody and 23% of the adult prison population have previously been in care. Over 20% of women who leave care between 16 and 19 become mothers within a year, compared to just 5% of the general population.

We need a movement to encourage all those involved to raise their game, even during a period of austerity. Reform also requires close collaboration with the children themselves and their organisations.

The good news is that there is a sound basis for policy change in reports from respected bodies across the political spectrum. The bad news is a deep pessimism that experienced and indeed committed practitioners won't survive.

First the good news. The report of the new economics foundation (nef), *A False Economy*, employs a 'Social Return on Investment' analysis which concludes that "between £4 and £6.10 worth of additional social value is generated for every additional pound invested in higher-quality residential care." The report says that "almost £700 million could be saved over a 20-year period on other social costs by investment in the right kind of residential care - enough to pay for the country's entire annual care bill for children in care." However, they fear that "good providers of residential care services face being pushed out in the drive to cut costs."

The Demos think tank and Barnardo's have produced a substantial book, drawing on primary research and case studies. Taking children from the family often occurs when other options have failed. This 'last resortism' means children enter care too late, when significant problems have developed, and when chances of a stable placement are lower. Assuming that the care system is wholly responsible for disadvantage and is failing is overly simplistic. Rather than annual snapshots, the government should publish longitudinal analysis linking pre-care and in-care experiences to later life outcomes.

The ICHA believes that placement instability is the key problem. It exacerbates pre-existing problems and increases vulnerability to further placement breakdown. Many moves were

resource or practice-led through a shortage of suitable placements or lack of planning. The current lack of homes also reduces choice. Avoiding delay, instability and abrupt transitions, could also save money. The report has modelled and costed two exemplar care journeys: the stable route costs £352,053 over 14 years while the unstable one costs £393,579 over 7 years. Failure costs money.

The plight of care leavers being left high and dry at 16 has also been highlighted by many, including the ICHA. The Centre for Social Justice's report "Breakthrough Britain: Couldn't Care Less" recommends increasing the age until which care leavers continue receiving support to 25. It says that "Care leavers will have access to something which their peers take for granted: support while they begin the process of starting out by themselves."

The then Children, Schools and Families Committee Select Committee produced a detailed report in March 2009 which said that "residential care [should] be considered on its merits rather than as a last resort for children who have been especially difficult to place elsewhere." It sought "reassurances that cost constraints are not compromising children's access to the most appropriate placement for them, and that children's views are given particular consideration when 'value for money' decisions are made about providers." It concluded that "the quality of experience that children have in care seems to be governed by luck to an utterly unacceptable degree" and the Government "...to place the highest priority on ensuring that every child gets everything they are entitled to."

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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.

