

Meeting of the Cross Party Group for
Looked After Children

WEDNESDAY 12TH MARCH 2014

12.30-1.30

AM's Present:

David Melding AM– Chairperson

Mohammad Asghar AM

In attendance:

Deborah Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Voices From Care

Rhian Williams, PA/Administrative Secretary, Voices From Care – Minute taker

By Invitation

Christopher Dunn Development Coordinator, Voices From Care

Nicola Mitchell – Member and Volunteer, Voices From Care

Jeremy Thomas, Children Resource Worker, TACT Fostering Wales.

Scott Ruddock, Area Manager, TACT Fostering Wales.

Debra Walker, Deputy Manager, east Wales, TACT Fostering Wales.

C. Kinsey, K. Lavender, L. Lavender S. Richards and J. Hopkins – TACT Young People

Apologies received from:

Mark Isherwood AM

Simon Thomas AM

Joyce Watson AM

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR

DM opened the meeting and extended a warm welcome to TACT Fostering Wales. DM led round table introductions and gave a brief overview of the purpose of the Cross Party Group on Looked After Children.

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 11th December 2013 were accepted as a true record.

MATTERS ARISING

There were no matters arising.

THE ELECTION OF A CHAIR AND SECRETARY

It was proposed and Mohammad Asghar AM seconded the re-election by affirmation of DM as chair and R. Williams as Secretary of the Cross Party Group on Looked After Children.

UPDATE ON SIBLINGS

DM informed that further to the previous APG on LAC meeting in December and with reference to the hand out of an article written in the Western Mail on 9th January this year, that quite good coverage had been received from the press on the lack of guidance on keeping siblings in care together, which gave the group something to build on.

PRESENTATION - HOW EXTENDING THE LEAVING CARE AGE TO 21 WOULD BENEFIT YOUNG PEOPLE

DM gave a brief overview of the Social Services and Wellbeing (Wales) Bill and the When I am Ready Scheme, stating that an amendment with extending the leaving care age to 21 was being included within the Bill. DM invited JT to lead the group through the presentation and thanked Voices From Care for inviting TACT to deliver a presentation and short film.

JT informed the film "Much Too Young" was a film featuring young people who have left TACT Cymru care or who are soon to leave their care. It included those who have been able to stay with foster carers after leaving care, as well as young people who have been required to leave foster care at 18 to move into independent living. JT added that some TACT young people who are in stable placements post 18 are passionate about assisting those young people who weren't and thanked those young people; some who were present today, for taking part in the making of the short film about their experiences. The young people present then introduced themselves personally.

DM thanked JT and the young people for showing a highly powerful film which he felt was so moving about young people in care talking about their issues, adding that their direct experience is very powerful. DM stated that despite changes in the law, in practice changes maybe a bit slower and enquired if the film could be used publicly, as he would like to send a copy of the film to committees, cabinet ministers and senior civil servants.

JT stated that as some of the young people were under 16, their respective local authorities would have to give their consent. A short discussion followed around the duration and content of the film and it was agreed the film would be retained at the same time length.

DJ suggested the possibility of showing the film at a forthcoming advocacy event in May and invited the young people present today to also attend as she felt that it was important that their voices be heard.

JT stated as young people are contributing to society we needed to assist them. SR informed that the young people present today were representing the views of young people in care who were less articulate and unable to be present today. SR stated that support should be across the board for young people looked after and not just the most vulnerable young people and he felt that it is a lottery which young people remain in care and do really well and those who do not and there is no equality of access.

DM raised the question of how he could assist in the campaign. CK stated that funding was required for foster carers to keep the placements going and S Richards agreed that it would make a lot of difference if funding was in place, but what about the support, adding that when you are in a family and 18 plus, it is not good bye, but when you are in a placement it is and certain young people do not speak with their birth families and when they leave their placement they are on their own. DW stated that local authorities are operating very differently and have different schemes and feels it is a lottery as there is no equality of access.

DM raised the question of what would happen if a foster carer decided not to keep a young person on. JT informed that if a bond and support were to be in place it should be okay, adding that young people should have more support post 18 and not less. JH informed that he was going to university and found it very worrying as to where he would go during the holidays.

JT informed that an amendment to the Social Services and Well- Being (Wales) Bill would allow local authorities to extend the age of foster care to 21. It would not, however, require them to do so and TACT hoped that many authorities would be willing to offer this extension, but believed that only an introduction of a legal duty would mean young people across Wales would be given the opportunity to stay in foster care.

DM stated that just because a law has improved, it did not necessarily mean it had in practice and felt that funding is a key element. SR agreed and added that if funding were available it should be ring fenced and not piece meal.

DM stated that a huge amount had been learnt from this meeting and key policy informers needed to be informed of this.

A short discussion took place around holding an event in the Oriel, Senedd with care leavers delivering a speech to and meeting with politicians.

ACTION: SR TO FORWARD FORMATTED DVD TO DM FOR DISTRIBUTION TO KEY MEMBERS

DM thanked everyone again for attending the meeting.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RW informed the next Cross Party Group on Looked After Children would be held at 12.00 midday on Wednesday 7th May.

There being no further business the meeting concluded at 1.30 p.m.