

# **The Michael Sieff Foundation**

working together for children's welfare



## **MORAL OPPORTUNITIES 16 to 18 Year Olds Leaving Care**

Report on the Conference hosted by  
the Michael Sieff Foundation  
held at The Inner London Probation Service  
January 1998

*Supported by HW Fisher & Company*

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## PANEL DISCUSSIONS AND CONFERENCE RECOMMENDATIONS

# The Michael Sieff Foundation

## “Moral Opportunities: 16 to 18 Year Olds Leaving Care”

Conference at Inner London Probation Service, January 1998

Prevention of child and family problems, by sensitive, early intervention and support at pre-school, primary and secondary school, and for children during care and aftercare, was again stressed as being both good practice and the most cost effective approach. Such a programme, as part of a national co-ordinated strategy, would ensure a substantial reduction in the appalling statistics pertaining to the 8,000 or so young people who leave care each year.

### Major Action Points Which Emerged During the Conference

1. By not including 16 year olds leaving care, the existence of the attractive Welfare To Work Programme will make it even more difficult for the young jobseeker under 18. The scheme should be extended to include 16 year olds for this very deprived but small group.
2. In the UK, parents on average, continue to support their children until the age of 23 years. Could the **legal duty** of Social Services for these children be extended to at least 18 years of age?
3. Could the benefit system be re-examined? The present £35 per week, plus rent could be too little. Innovative schemes should be encouraged. For instance, Bath & N.E. Somerset Council have introduced a savings plan whereby, over many months, a small amount of money is invested weekly for each young person in care. This money, together with the interest, is available to help them on leaving care.
4. No child should be excluded from one school after another, since this often leads to exclusion from society. Schools should be able to apply for essential help from Central Government funds, made specifically available, via Local Authorities, to give disadvantaged children the stable education they need.
5. A child with a criminal record for quite minor offences will find obtaining work even harder, since many organisations, such as the Armed Forces, Nursing and the Police ban those with a record. The US have a system whereby the young person, on completion of their sentence can apply to the Courts for their criminal record to be immediately expunged. Can we not follow this example?
6. Community Service Orders, if revitalised and used more often, would be a worthwhile alternative to prison.
7. Many young people in care are moved too often, which does not help in stabilising their already often highly traumatised lives.
8. There is an urgent need to build and improve partnerships between Central Government, Local Authorities, industry, commerce and the voluntary sector, as regards the education and employment of these young people.
9. A register should be established of industrial and other employers, who are willing to train and employ these particular children.
10. Every child leaving care should have a “mentor” to help them until they reach at least 21 years old. Ideally this should be a legal duty of the Social Services, and should be established well before the child leaves care.

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## 1. Introduction

The Lord Haslam, Chairman, The Michael Sieff Foundation

I would like to welcome you all on behalf of my fellow Trustees, and in particular on behalf of Elizabeth, who has led the planning team with her usual vigour and enthusiasm. I would also add how grateful we are to you all for giving your very valuable time to-day. By the end of the meeting, we hope you will feel that it has been a worthwhile and productive day.

We are delighted to have such a splendid cross section of people, representing all the key elements of our society who have real concern for the welfare of children. However, I would like to express a particular welcome to those people from industry and business, because it is the first time we have had such representation at one of our Conferences and, of course, on this issue this is vital. We also have representatives of the main Government Departments, who are involved in children's development, and we do hope they will feel free to express their views.

Today's Conference is particularly timely. Its objective is to improve the lives of children who are leaving care, many of whom will become socially excluded very quickly, if further steps are not taken.

We welcome the Government's new initiatives in the "Welfare to Work Programme", but as we all know, this only starts at the age of 18, hence, the unsupported youngsters that we are concerned with today have to survive two years before they become eligible. We seem to have two options. Firstly, and this sounds to be a simple one, is to extend the "Welfare to Work Programme" down to the age of 16, for this special category of young people leaving care. Secondly, if that is not a feasible option for the Government, then we have to find other ways of creating a better future for these young people. This is the main challenge for the Conference today.

We hope that some of the ideas and recommendations which emerge will find favour with Government and will be adopted in effective partnerships with and by the organisations represented here today. Also, as has happened in the past, our Conference report will publicise our major recommendations to a wider audience, since our reports are in great demand and are read enthusiastically.

## 2. Bridging The Gap.

Sir Bob Reid, is Chairman of The Industrial Society and also Chairman of Sears. He became Chairman of Shell UK in 1985, before moving into the Nationalised Industries.

He started by commenting that when Lady Haslam approached him about this Conference she had done so with great feeling and enthusiasm. She had described the situation which was a challenge to us all: a challenge to those employers who, every year, take on many young people through a demanding and rigorous recruitment process; a challenge to the administrators of the care process who try to ensure that these young people can pass easily into the world of work; a challenge to the educators and the trainers who prepare people for employment and who ensure that the obligations of work and their "raison d'être" are understood. Finally, it is a challenge to the individuals themselves who have to build the self-esteem and the confidence to go forward with a high chance of success. These are only some of the elements which will make for a successful outcome.

## The Survey 2020.

In the Industrial Society we have just conducted a major survey, entitled 2020, on the fears and aspirations of over ten thousand young people from across the widest spectrum of education, origin and circumstances. We asked the simple question: "What would you like 2020 to be and what agenda for action would you wish to be put in place to achieve that view and that vision?"

The outcomes were informative and educational, since above all, it revealed a mature, responsible and caring young population, generous towards misfortune, realistic towards responsibilities and very strong on relationships. Its message about the importance of domestic security, preparation for work and individual help are clear to all of us. Relative to this conference today, the message I believe, would be one of expectation of a willingness to help and a capability to do this in a way which was both creative and successful. Despite much written to the contrary, these youngsters have a confidence and a belief in their predecessors. This is something which we should be proud of but it is something which brings its own responsibilities.

It is against this background I make my remarks. Although I am realistic about generic problems, I am still reluctant to commit to the creation of a societal class called "care leavers". To progress solutions some classification may often be necessary but it seems wrong, however tidy it may be, to condemn a young person to a single group. At 16 your individuality is only beginning to emerge into early maturity - your solution therefore, in my view, has to be individual and that's what makes it a difficult problem.

## Industry Today

Britain has witnessed an enormous transformation in the workplace, starting in the early eighties with the elimination of massive manpower surpluses to achieve higher productivity and to regain competitiveness in the market place. This meant fewer people doing more things and working more intelligently and more effectively. In turn this put a premium on the development of personal skills and flexibility. In a way it has been part of a second industrial revolution and it has been integrated with the technological revolution driven by the development of the computer in every aspect of commercial and industrial life. The analytical and precision capability of the computer has impacted equally on the clerical activity and the technical operation. The computer's sales analysis expose success and failure while manufacturing processes respond to the precise instruction of the computer.

The vulnerability of the business, however, does not lie simply in the smooth operation of the hardware. It depends on the accuracy of the information with which the computer has been fed and in a retail business this information comes directly from the point of sale, when the sales assistant enters the sale in the till. The conduct of this basic function is fundamental to the success of the business: and importantly in many businesses, this technological miracle depends on the abilities and the concentration of the newest person in the organisation, to make or damage the whole hierarchy of responsibilities. It is a strange phenomenon - but a real one - that as a business becomes more sophisticated it is the simple tasks that become more critical. This is why the preparation of the people to carry out these duties is so important to a corporation, and that's what makes recruitment so critical to an individual corporation. This phenomenon is not restricted to the retail market. Just think back - it is not only a captain who can sink a ship: the person responsible for closing the door of the ferry can be equally effective!

## Stepping Stones To Work

"Bridging the Gap" is a title which could conjure up a mistaken concept of basic deficiency, with a real possibility of failure. A better mental picture for me would be of stepping stones - individual steps that have to be taken to make a safe crossing into the world of work. What we are really talking about, in fact, is meeting the challenge of transition. These stepping stones begin to emerge, in the following way:

Firstly, acceptance that attention to detail is a competence that needs developing. This does not come naturally, it needs personal discipline: personal discipline which is found easily on the sports field, the music room, the Nintendo game and the skate board.

Secondly, continued application is important. Concentration is a mental skill which can be enhanced by its practice. Again this can often be more easily developed in the recreational field.

Thirdly, responsibility and this, like the first two stepping stones, becomes easier if the need for it is carefully and well communicated. The skilled communicator will not only stress the importance of what is needed but will explain the implications if these stones are not in place. A sinking ferry and shops out of stock may be dramatic examples but they get the message home.

So far what I have talked about is entry to the world of work - the difficulties of that transition stage and the nature of the demands that will face the beginner - any beginner from whatever area they come from.

## Practical Employment Issues

Let me address now whether these problems are any more difficult for the care leaver. My experience in the Railways of taking youngsters off the street into employment has some worthwhile messages.

Firstly, it was important to learn as much as possible about the individuals before you could begin properly to mentor them. Secondly, it was important to create a domestic circumstance which was stable and confidence building. Thirdly, and I believe this was very important, it was key to create an intellectual development channel through which there would be achievement and recognition outside of work. This was as important for building self esteem as being successful at work. Self development has the individual concentration which creates self belief.

I believe each of these points should concern the employer in making their plans for accessing the pool of care leavers but for the successful employer this should simply be a matter of confirming that their recruitment scheme contains these critical elements.

The arguments for accessing the growing pool of care leavers draws heavily on corporations' societal concerns and many companies discharge their responsibilities in this regard in a generous and munificent way. But employment is another matter: one person preferred to many employers is another worthy one denied. The positive report card outweighs the negative and this is the reality of their business that you are threatening in this field.

Handicapped employment, they may argue, is a better bet and they do that. The record card for many is most unsettling, and in the final instance, many will say, let's give money and leave it at that. Unfortunately this is probably a "gloves off", real description of the problem you are facing here and talking about today. It is not that these companies are not well intentioned, it is not that these companies will not be generous, but it is not an issue of deep concern to them and that it is what needs to be overcome.

When I go back to the Railways and ask myself why did schemes, both inside and outside the Railway, work and why was our work provision to young offenders successful - the answer is common to all cases. It is because the employer and the provider both believed strongly in an individual's right to a fresh start and were prepared to commit time in the preparation and translation of the individual into their own work situation. That really was the key to the success of these schemes.

Magic people can do magic things and it is these people that you must find and who must be enabled and empowered. When I look at the Railways example, there were magic people involved who made those projects and those initiatives work. They knew the case was a strong one - particularly with the well-known urban problems of London right on their very doorstep - but they also knew that a case had to be made if the final stepping stone of engagement between the parties was to be put in place. Their success blossomed and it became an example to the eight other Railways that used to make up Network SouthEast.

## Conclusion

Finally, turning back to the 2020 initiative conducted by the Industrial Society, there are one or two quotations upon which all of us could usefully reflect.

There is a dire statement from one interview which says: "In general the future seems very insecure, very dark", but this can be put against another statement in which the individual states "I don't think Britain is going downhill as everybody makes it out to be - it is just that we are expecting more now than we were in the past". These two comments cover a wide range of individual assessments from the widest possible range of environments. Very often the more pessimistic came from the more fortunate. And there is a message there. However, the most optimistic message came from the most unlikely place. There was one young boy in his early teens who had been a traveller all his life; his parents moved continuously from location to location and his disruption was total. His view on the world was very positive in that he saw great opportunities for the future and he was confident, even at the age of 12, that everything was going to work out all right. I have thought a long time about this statement, because somewhere this young person had developed a confidence, a self-esteem and a security that would allow him to go forward and participate confidently.

*It is this confident spirit that everyone coming out of care must have, if the rest of their life is to be positive, contributory and successful. The real question is how do you develop and nurture this spirit - this innate confidence and self belief.*

This is the primary reason why a Conference like this is so important as I hope it will deal with the fundamentals of transition and the way forward for individuals who, often through no fault of their own, made a false start to their lives and desperately need a new beginning.

### 3. “Government Initiatives”

Alan Howarth CBE, MP, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Employment and Equal Opportunities and Minister of Welfare To Work Programmes, began by congratulating The Michael Sieff Foundation for having arranged such a worthwhile conference. He continued, that the gathering with so much expertise and commitment, was ideally placed to reflect together on how we may better help those children who are amongst the most disadvantaged in our society, or as some may say, excluded from our society. Such commitment did not happen automatically, and he emphasised that the Government, whose commitment to this cause was just as strong, still had a great deal to do. However, with central and local government working together to address the problems of social exclusion with all the other agencies, including the voluntary sector, we could make existing initiatives work much better for young people who have been in care. Although he said he was aware that we needed an holistic approach across Government, he would naturally dwell a good deal on what the Department for Education and Employment had underway in terms of education, training and employment programmes.

#### Education

There is a huge waste of human potential in this country, with too many young people finding themselves in a vicious circle of family deprivation, social exclusion, poverty and unemployment. If we are to establish a decent society in which every individual feels valued, then this waste has to stop. In talking about our strategy to create an inclusive society, founded on the skills and talents of its members, these can only be fostered through education, perhaps as importantly as anything else. We have got to be better at offering the appropriate opportunities that individuals need to obtain and retain sustainable work and continue their self-development, and whose fuller lives make a real contribution to society. However, we know that young people leaving care can be at a horrifying disadvantage, with the chilling fact that 75% of people leave care with no educational qualifications whatsoever, compared to 6% for all young people. And this is a shameful situation.

There is much extensive work underway, in the teaching profession and with Educational Authorities and also in my Department, aimed at tackling underachievement in schools. We are all too aware in the Department for Education and Employment that Government may not have got everything right in the past. The pressures on teachers, the crowding of the timetable, and the endless requirements that we lay upon them, perhaps leave too little time for teachers to apply the pastoral role. Whilst we must continue the drive to improve academic standards, we must not forget that life is also about a range of human qualities and gifts which require equal respect. We must aim for a better balance in the life of schools than Government pressure has hitherto emphasised.

#### Expectations

I think it is right to insist on the raising of expectations because if young people feel that life has very little to offer, it is precisely because their expectations are too low. We need to instil in every young person a greater degree of self confidence, which is an indispensable foundation for other achievements. Where there are areas of exceptional educational failure, so we are proposing to establish Education Action Zones in which we hope to liberate ourselves from some of the orthodoxy, and the compartmentalisation that tends to permeate our affairs too much. We have to become better at forming partnerships and of mobilising the range of skills and energies that are available in those communities.

We have mentioned these points in the White Paper, “Excellence in Schools” and the legislation to enable Education Action Zones to be established is now before Parliament. Sir William Utting’s Report, “People Like Us”, graphically illustrates the plight of looked after children including the problems they face after 16, and the Government is considering the recommendations with the greatest care. We have established a Ministerial Task Force, led by Frank Dobson, Secretary of State for Health, to take these issues forward. Estelle Morris, my colleague in the Department for Education and Employment, on the Schools side, will be representing the Department on that Task Force. Some of our new Training and Employment initiatives are going to be particularly relevant to the needs of the group with whom we are particularly concerned. As we set out in our recent consultation document, “Learning and Working Together for the Future”, tackling disadvantage lies at the heart of my Department’s priorities as well as of Government as a whole. To provide better education, training and employment opportunities over all are critical to this.

## The New Deal Initiative

One of our major policies is the New Deal which I feel will be a big step forward for young people aged 18 and above, who are at particular disadvantage in the labour market. Many of you will already be involved in your own localities in the development of New Deal, so you will know that the plans and the practices that we will develop, are seeking to give young people the opportunity to improve their employability. It is not a window dressing project, aimed at reducing the numbers of the unemployed, but it is a very serious undertaking to enhance the employability of young people and also, in due course, of older people who are at a significant disadvantage in the labour market. We propose through the New Deal to offer young people who, for the most part, have been unemployed for 6 months or more, four high quality options. In the case of people who have been in Care within the last three years, the 6 month delay will not apply. These options are:

- A job with an employer for six months. The employer will receive a subsidy to encourage the employment of someone who they might otherwise overlook.
- Full time education and training for up to a year without loss of welfare benefits.
- Six months work experience in the voluntary sector
- Six months working with an environment Task Force.

Each of these options, not just the full time education and training option, would include education and training for the equivalent of one day a week, working towards an improved qualification.

We have in the New Deal scheme, what I think is a creative and original aspect of outstanding value, the Gateway. At the period of initiation, a young person coming onto the New Deal is met in the Gateway by a personal advisor, who will be committed to that young person and supportive to that young person as a fellow human being, all the way through the process of the New Deal. His role will be to befriend, support and advise the participant of New Deal, to work in partnership with others who have complementary skills and expertise to those which we have within the Employment Service, in developing a personal action plan which helps the

young person progress clearly to one of the options with confidence. This is a big departure from the traditional, rather formulaic approach, previously taken by the Employment Service, and the response to this change has been tremendous. There has been a surge of idealism to the challenge and opportunity to working in a direct continuing basis with a particular person, and to working in a new kind of partnership with others who can contribute to the support that that particular young person ought to have. If the young person does not find a job by the end of the option period, there will be continuing personalised support, somewhat on the Gateway model, in the follow through period. To implement the much better service provided by New Deal as a whole, we have allocated some £3 ½ billion during the lifetime of this Parliament.

## Investing in Young People

Whilst it is true that with this £3 ½ billions, we have only been able to target those aged 18 years and above, we do recognise the importance and the urgency of providing better help to the 16 - 18 year olds. So we are reviewing what more can be done to improve the education, training and employment prospects of young people in that age range who have ceased to be looked after. The Department has strong links, of course, with many organisations and bodies that are active in this area - the Rathbone Community Industry, Cities In Schools, Community Service Volunteers, The Who Cares? Trust, The Prince's Trust, and many others, all of whom are dedicated to supporting the most disadvantaged young people. I think I can say that they are all committed to the Government's New Start strategy. There is £10 million to fund that initiative, part of what we are calling The Investing in Young People Campaign, which David Blunkett launched in December. Investing in Young People is an improved Government strategy, designed to fill the gap between the changes and reforms that will bear directly upon schools and the New Deal which is addressed to a slightly older age range.

I do think that it is tragic the way so many young people are coming out of school without getting into training and employment. We are concerned to support them and prevent them from falling through the gaps in the system, and I hope that Investing In Young People will bring about a very positive change in this regard. We must ensure that as many of our young people as possible stay on in education and training, including those who do get into jobs. We want all young people who can, to get either 5 GCSEs at grades A-C, or an intermediate GNVQ, or at any rate a NVQ level 2. I know this is setting sights high

for many people, those many care leavers who all too often come out of school with no qualifications at all. So we must be careful, sensitive and imaginative in finding ways to help them break into achievement.

There is a key part of Investing In Young People, where the New Start strategy itself provides a systematic approach to re-engaging in learning, especially for young people between the ages of 14 and 17, who have become detached and disaffected from learning. You may legitimately ask, “Why all these demarcations, why do you have one programme for 18 +s, another for 14 - 17s, can’t you see the need for continuity?” I certainly can see the need for continuity. I visited a primary school in my new constituency in Newport East, in an area of multiple deprivation, where there are two and three generations of unemployment, with the signs of despair all too visible. This school, with 40 children in the tiny, crowded classroom, had proceedings interrupted continuously by people needing to get from one end of the school to the other, by going through the middle of this classroom. The teacher pointed with sad assurance to a number of children who she could foretell, because of their personal and domestic circumstances, that their future life chances, as she read them, were going to be in difficulty. We do have to identify early, those people who particularly need help and we do have to ensure that this help is much more coherent and continuous.

### **Local Partnership Projects**

Central to New Start is the funding of Local Partnership Projects to draw together and build on existing initiatives. So far 17 partnership projects include the Careers Service, Schools, Further Education Colleges, Training and Enterprise Councils, Local Authorities, Youth Service and voluntary organisations. I say local authorities as a blanket term but I think all of us are conscious that within local authorities there can be unhelpful demarcations. If there is an edgy and difficult interface between Education and Social Services in a local authority, that also is an important problem that does need to be addressed.

But apart from the 17 directly funded partnerships under New Start, there are many other partnerships which we want to support, aimed at addressing problems of disaffection at a local level. Some New Start projects have a particular focus on care leavers, for example, those based in Sheffield, Cambridgeshire and County Durham and Darlington. In addition, we have established a New Start advisory group of national experts who will be considering with us what

more can be done through New Start for care leavers. Children coming from public care are, of course, covered by the guarantee of training, in the same way as other 16 - 17 year olds but I’ve already acknowledged that this has not worked as well as it should or needs to do. As you know, this guarantee also extends to young people aged 18 years and over who have been prevented from taking up training because of particularly difficult circumstances in their own lives such as having been in Care.

### **Further Education**

Further education is a key aspect, with massive potential in the provision of education for the 16 - 18 age group and, of course, for life long learning. Both the report that Helen Kennedy has offered us and the report from Professor John Tomlinson, define the needs and the challenges very usefully, and to which the Government certainly wants to respond as positively as it can. We are asking the Careers Service to play a creative part, by means of good quality careers education and guidance, to help in motivating young people to raise their aspirations and fulfil their potential, no matter what their background or circumstances.

You may be critical of the position on Job Seekers Allowance benefits, which we inherited. However, there is special provision whereby young 16-17 year olds leaving local authority care, who cannot live at home, can claim CSA for between 8 and 12 weeks after they leave school, while they are looking for training, education or work.

In the generally bleak picture of care leavers, I do not wish to suggest that they have had no decent support as human beings because many of them have. There are dedicated people working all over this country using their skills and expertise with success in supporting these children who, for whatever reasons, have been taken into care. Yet despite all these efforts, too often, many of these children are expected to make the difficult transition from an often disturbed and traumatic childhood into adulthood, largely by themselves. They need much better support to find accommodation, and to sort themselves out in terms of education and training. I am far from implying that the scene for care leavers is totally desolate and that there is nothing for them, that is clearly not true. But, however good the efforts made by very many caring people, let us all agree that we need to do better.

### **Conclusion**

The Utting Review reminds us that local authorities should exercise their duties and powers under The

Children Act to help care leavers in the spirit of responsible parents. No matter how good the education and training schemes may be, if the commitment from local authorities isn't genuinely there then those young people are going to be at an unnecessarily intensified disadvantage.

The Youth Service touches the lives of many young people who have been in care and I believe that the Youth Service is very greatly valued by many of them. There are some 60 National Youth Organisations, funded by the Government to pursue programmes of work concerned with the social and personal education of young people, particularly those aged 13-19. The grants scheme to these organisations aims to widen access to the Youth Services, especially for those who are disadvantaged or have disabilities, or come from minority ethnic groups.

Whilst asking other organisations to work in partnership with Government, we accept that we need a more cohesive effort ourselves, if we are to tackle the multiple disadvantages of marginalised young people. To this end, you will be aware that the Government has set up the Social Exclusion Unit with the intention to enable us better to pull together the contributions and needs across all Government Departments and to take a more synoptic view of the opportunities for Government to help. The Social Exclusion Unit is keenly interested in finding the best ways of targeting help to those who need it most. In recent years the Department of Health and the Department for Education and Employment have collaborated on a number of projects: we have jointly issued materials to complement the guidance produced by national voluntary organisations; we

have supported conferences designed to publicise good practice in helping looked after children and we are jointly supporting innovatory projects by the National Children's Bureau and The Who Cares? Trust and a number of local authorities. Whilst benefits that are flowing from this work, more needs to be done and we do need to consider how we can become better prepared to support looked after children in the transition to employment and for their subsequent careers.

Individual support through mentoring, for example, appears to be particularly valuable, where it can be practised and the Department is working closely with a number of organisations, Cities In Schools for example, to support them in developing such approaches.

I've used the term partnership rather frequently in what I have had to say, but I cannot overstate the importance of genuine partnership among equals. The strategies that partnerships should develop and apply, do need to be jointly developed and jointly owned and are not, as it were, imposed "from above". Government does wish to work in that kind of partnership with statutory and voluntary organisations, employers and TECs together with many others whom I have already mentioned. I personally look forward to working with you.

Too many young people are falling by the wayside, too many in our society have passed by on the other side. We all have to work together if we are to ensure that young people leaving care are able to realise their own personal potential to discover fulfilled lives and to play a full part in society.

#### 4. The Legal Position

Richard White, Solicitor, and a Trustee of The Michael Sieff Foundation, gave a presentation with reference to a paper prepared by Allan Levy QC, who, at the last minute, could not attend. Richard said that contrary to normal practice, on this occasion the solicitor had been briefed by Leading Counsel. Everyone had a copy of Allan Levy's paper, but just like counsel, Richard departed from the brief and focused more specifically on the Children Act and benefit provisions.

- More than 75% of care leavers have no academic qualifications of any kind
- More than 50% of young people leaving care after 16 years are unemployed
- Some 17% of young women leaving care are pregnant or already mothers
- Around 10% of 16 and 17 year old claimants of severe hardship payments, have been in care
- About 23% of adult prisoners and 38% of young prisoners have been in care
- Some 30% of single homeless people have been in care

*A Social Services Inspectorate's Report, "When Leaving Home is also Leaving Care", 1997.*

## Children In Care

First of all, who are we talking about? The title of the conference refers to 16 to 18 year olds leaving care. The Children Act uses Care in a narrow legal way, referring only to children subjected to a Care Order. This is actually only a small group of those children who are looked after by local authorities. You will have heard the Minister use the phrase, but it also includes many children who are provided with accommodation, perhaps on a voluntary basis, with the agreement of the parents. However, the fact remains that in respect of many of the children looked after by local authorities, the relationship with those

parents who retain parental responsibility for their children are often very tenuous.

I would emphasise that we must not always assume the worst of these children, since there is no sin in the child being associated with the local authority. The title of the Utting Report, "People Like Us", is a significant and apt title. Nonetheless, those unable to rely on their parents for support often look to the many relationships that they have made whilst being looked after by the local authority. These relationships with foster parents and residential care staff will continue to be important to them, way beyond their period within local authority responsibility.

"It is of vital importance that young people are properly prepared for this step and are given access to support afterwards. Young people coming towards this stage will do so from a wide variety of backgrounds and in a wide variety of circumstances, at various ages and with various levels of support available to them from families and friends. All of this implies the need for a very flexible service to meet such a wide range of potentially differing experiences and needs. The quality of preparation for leaving care, and of the after care subsequently provided, may profoundly affect the rest of a young person's life".

*Volume 3, Family Placements, The Children Act 1989, Guidance and Regulations 1991, HMSO, paragraphs 9.3 and 9.4.*

I think there are two important points to make about this. The quality of preparation for leaving care does not have a good record, according to reports. I wonder to what extent this is due to tunnel vision. I feel that it is extremely important that the local partnerships mentioned by the Minister, receive an input from the wide range of sources that he described. Local Authorities should ensure that this issue is included in their Children's Services Plans.

The provisions of **Section 24 of the Children Act 1989**, set out the powers and duties of local authorities in respect of preparing young people they are looking after for the time when they cease to be so looked after. Section 24(1) places a **duty** on the local authority "to advise, assist and befriend" the child they are looking after "with a view to promoting his welfare when he ceases to be looked after by them". Section 24(2) places on a local authority, responsibilities to advise and befriend any young person who qualifies for "advice and assistance". This applies to any young person aged under 21 who ceases, after reaching 16, to be looked after by a local authority or voluntary organisation. These responsibilities may be a duty or a power depending upon the circumstances.

A local authority also has a **power** to give assistance to anyone who qualifies "for advice and assistance" and who was formerly looked after by the local

authority. It may be a contribution to expenses for a variety of things or grants. A grant to meet expenses connected with education or training may be continued until the end of the course, even if the person is then 21.

**Section 4(1) of the Social Security Act 1988** raised the basic age of entitlement to income support to 18. Some local authorities do try and encourage children to stay in care until they are eligible for benefits at the age of 18. Claimants between 16 and 18 must either (a) satisfy special conditions or (b) persuade the Secretary of State to issue a direction that "severe hardship" will result .....unless income support is paid: **see Social Security Contributions and Benefits Act 1992, sections 123(1), 124 [as amended by the Jobseekers Act 1995, section 41(4), (5), Sch 2, para. 30, Sch 3] 134 as amended, 135 as amended, and 136.**

We are, as the Minister admitted, still stuck in Section 4 of the Social Security Act of 1988, which raised the basic age of entitlement to income support to 18. It is actually quite difficult to find anybody who really supports that provision, apart from the last Government and the presumably the current Government.

There are two ways in which the 16 and 17 year old can acquire funds:

To satisfy the “special conditions” in section (a), you have to demonstrate hardship. However, hardship only applies in very limited circumstances, i.e. where a young person is an orphan, is living away from his parents to avoid physical or sexual abuse, is estranged from his or her parents, is in physical or moral danger or there is a serious risk to mental health. Even then,

as the Minister admitted, help is only for a limited period. It is unclear how many of the young people with whom we are concerned would wish to admit that they come within those categories. Alternatively, a claimant has to persuade the Secretary of State to issue a direction that “severe hardship” will result. But this is only a discretion and is unappealable

“Social Services don't always help. They do not check where you are going to live, you only have one chance, if you blow it - tough!”

*From report “People Like Us”, Sir William Utting, 1997.*

Finally, Allan referred to some necessary changes. He suggests:

1. The duty “to advise, assist and befriend” should be extended to the age of 25. Alan Howarth talked about the support given to children being looked after and also when they had left local authority accommodation. Just ask yourself this in respect of your own children. Would you, as the current statute requires, cut them off from all support at 21? That is the effect of the current law.
2. Section 24 should apply to all children over 12 and not 16 as at present. The present statutory provisions actually encourage local authorities to move children around, and to move young people nearing the age of 16 out of their area. I heard on the radio about a current case, in which the High Court decided, on the construction of Section 24, that the authority that should be responsible for the young person when he is over 16, is the authority in which the person was placed and is now living. That is actually an encouragement to an authority, and particularly with London authorities, to place children out of their area at 17,

so that the new authority has to take responsibility for that youth. And as the Director of Social Services for Kent County Council recently said on the radio, “I wouldn't mind doing it but we just don't have the funds, we are not funded for that purpose”. This is an area which I suggest needs **urgent** attention.

3. Utting also observed that, “local authorities should exercise their duties and powers under section 24 of the Act in the spirit of responsible parents..... No responsible parent turns a child away at 16 - or even 18 - unsupported financially and emotionally, without hope of succour in distress. There should be a **duty** on local authorities to monitor care leavers for a period of time.

We were particularly concerned by the volume of anecdotal information about young people ceasing to be looked after at the age of 16, which suggested that some authorities operated informal policies of encouraging premature ‘independence’. This definitely needs serious attention.

## 5. Brendon Barber, Deputy General Secretary, TUC

After Brendon Barber was introduced by Lord Haslam as an influential member of the TUC, who thought deeply about children, he was quick to state that, although he was very pleased to have the opportunity to address the conference, he felt a certain humility when he considered the expertise and experiences of many in the audience.

### Education

There are many pressures operating on young people today as they enter the world of employment, with most following one of two routes. One route is through the education system, through further or higher education, where qualifications can offer at least a chance of a job, even if there is often no guarantee of a quality job. Today more and more

graduates are deployed in clerical jobs, which a few years ago would have been filled by non graduates. However, for those who do not move into further study at all, the prospects are very grim. Around 21% of under 20 year olds, not in full time education, are out of work and that is double the unemployment rate for other age groups. If you are young and black then the figure rises again.

Youth unemployment remains a serious problem despite the general improvement in the labour market and despite the decline in the numbers competing for work. But young people leaving care face particular challenges. The research shows that between a half and two-thirds of these young people leave care with no formal qualifications. A not un-typical study that was undertaken by one local authority found 43% of young people leaving care had not entered for GCSE examinations. 35% had not had a careers interview and over half had not been on any kind of work experience placement. Only 12% go on to further study compared to 68% of the youth as a whole. And only an estimated 1% of care leavers make it to higher education.

The prospects for employment are bleak. Half of all young people leaving care are unemployed. For the lucky ones who do find employment, too often the jobs that they are in are temporary, part-time, badly paid, and with little training available, there is really very little chance of escaping to something better. Now in highlighting these issues I am very well aware of the danger of stereo typing young people leaving care as doomed to failure. That would be wrong and would be totally counter productive. For many young people the experience of being in care is positive and it can give them important experiences to enable them to cope very well as they enter the adult world of work. But for too many young people the outlook is grim and low educational achievement blights their employment prospects.

## Training

Recent Government policy has made the education of young people a top priority and, as we heard from the Minister, there has been a strong emphasis on standards in schools, and new National Traineeships are intended to lever up the quality of the outdated Youth Training Schemes. Modern apprenticeships now operate in a wide range of sectors, allowing young people to gain skills and qualifications for employment. The Government's New Deal programme will offer a suite of employment and training opportunities for unemployed people over 18. So young people leaving care will be able to gain from some of these choices. Indeed the new Right to Study for 16 and 17 year olds will give those in employment a chance to continue their studies after leaving school.

Unfortunately, some of these choices will be inaccessible. Employers in many sectors insist on an entry qualification of 5 GCSEs for many modern apprenticeships and of course the New Deal itself is only for 18 years and upwards, excluding 16 and 17

year olds. So there is a danger that however well intentioned these programmes are, there is a risk that they will leave care leavers further behind than their counterparts, unless particular attention is paid to the specific educational and financial issues facing care leavers.

The report 'Too Much Too Young', that was published just a couple of years ago by the Action on Aftercare Consortium, set out a careful analysis about the education and employment problems that beset young people leaving care. This showed how few local authorities are using their available powers to provide financial assistance for education, training and employment. It showed too that a few children in care do have access to good quality careers guidance and it contained over 40 recommendations on ways of easing a transition from care to independence. Many of these are still relevant today.

## The TUC Contribution

That report, not surprisingly, did not talk particularly about the role of Trade Unions, but let me just briefly say something of the contribution that we have a responsibility to make. The issue of life long learning is very high on the TUCs agenda. We recognise that people need good basic skills and continuing access to education and training, so that they can cope with and adapt to the radical transformation of life style that industry, occupation and job roles will bring. I think Trade Unions are seen as important partners in any drive for skills. Pressure from employees can make a big contribution in pushing employers to make a proper investment in the skills of the workforce. Indeed a positive partnership between employers and trade unions can build trust and confidence whilst embedding training in the culture of the workplace. So at national, sectoral and indeed at local level we work positively with Government and policy makers to design and implement programmes and initiatives to widen access to education and training. Through a network of particular projects that we have devised with the Training and Enterprise Councils, called 'Bargaining for Skills', we are building up the capacity of union representatives to negotiate for improved and better training in the workplace. Just this year we have established our own task group to ensure that all trade unions really build up this role as ambassadors for, and indeed direct providers of, education and training opportunities.

## Future Challenges

Against this background there is clearly scope for us to do more to address the particular needs of care leavers. In our work with Government and other public bodies, we must seek to ensure that their needs

are recognised in the way programmes are designed. At the workplace level too, there is perhaps scope for unions to put more pressure on employers to contribute to local programmes, provide jobs and placements for young people leaving care, and to offer them advice and support. Expanding mentoring schemes could provide some real assistance in helping the successful transition into employment.

It is a fact that young people in employment are less likely to be in trade unions than older workers, because the areas of employment in which they are concentrated are the areas in which trade unions are

least well organised. So, we have a job to do extending trade unionism and the support it can offer to young people. Indeed, this is a challenge that we particularly recognised, with the launch just this week of a new TUC initiative as part of our new unionism project, to take forward our work on recruitment and organisation, particularly amongst young people. I think that this initiative may also be able to make an indirect contribution to this agenda too. I very much look forward to discussing how together, we can better respond to the great challenges that we all face.

## 6. Margaret Murray, Human Resources Directorate, CBI

In her presentation, Margaret Murray, spoke from the point of view of the national policy perspective of the CBI, and did not pretend to any expertise as regards children leaving care. She began by showing a Casio digital diary, which she thought was the last word in technology when it was given to her four years ago. Six months later when seeking to purchase another, was told it no longer existed, and so had to purchase a much updated version instead. When her brother-in-law also wanted one, she went to the shop where she had purchased the original and was surrounded by very bright young men, looking at her diary as though it were an antique. Margaret Murray felt that this little story captured in a nutshell the rapidity of change and so many of the forces and energies that will affect the lives of young people, in relation to the expertise they will require in work in the 21st Century.

### The 21st Century: A Global Economy

In the first part I will focus on the all pervasive world global economy that the young people can expect to live in. There is no country I know of in the world that is not deregulating, by opening its borders to the forces of global competition. Technological advances - like my Casio story - abound. Even small firms, are moving their computer processing to countries like India, because of the IT skill shortage and costs here. There is no doubt that the information revolution will gather pace.

Against this background, employment itself is changing. If we stand back and examine the qualities that are becoming increasingly prominent in recruitment ads and in employer demands, we will see three things.

**Responsibility** - a quality whereby the individual realises that whatever they do has an impact on the whole. In practice, they are responsible for others. Long gone are the days when you took a telephone call and said, "Oh can I take a message. She is not here?" Instead you now say, "Can I deal with this?" Sharp Electronics in the Northwest for example have trained every one of their employees to be responsible for dealing with a call from start to finish.

**Adaptability** - people need to thrive on change, to

expect it as a fact of life, and become uneasy if it is not happening. The Casio microcosm illustrates the sheer pace of change. L'Oreal have in their business culture a sense that if things are going well, they will say to themselves, it is not quite right. We should always be slightly on edge waiting to respond to change and looking to do better.

**Creativity** - perhaps the most attractive of all. In this global economy in which we all live, it is our ability to do things better than others that will give us the edge. Quality and efficiency are now largely taken for granted; we expect it and technology largely ensures it. What we therefore look for is the new. How many of you, as you go around Marks and Spencer's, find your eyes involuntarily attracted to those three letters NEW. It is the ability to come in each day and say, "How can we do this better, how can we do it differently?" One Youth Trainee that I know, was taking an NVQ in customer care, and part of her project was to measure and demonstrate an improvement to customer services. She was working at a till in office which took in cars for repair. She suggested to management, "Why don't we install a coffee machine here, why don't we sell some of the different products of the garage?" Within a week, as a result of her idea, the intake had more than doubled and even better, had paid the cost to her employers of her NVQ. That is real creativity.

The employment pattern is another dimension which has become more prominent, in that the drive continues towards ever more **highly skilled** employees. This is a reality, and unskilled jobs as many used to know them will virtually disappear.

There will be more **flexibility** in working patterns. It has been estimated that by the year 2000 about half of all jobs will no longer follow the conventional pattern of a full time permanent job. Many will be part time, contracts, temporary and so forth.

Currently 13% of jobs are **self-employed** and you can expect that to increase. In this context, the advice that Charles Handy gave to his two children when they were leaving school seems apposite. He discouraged them from going to university but he said, "For the next ten years or so don't look for an employer, look for customers." I'll leave with you that entrepreneurial thought.

### Timely Opportunities

The issue at the heart of today is clear - How to ensure that 16 - 18 year olds have the qualities they need for life, for relationships and also to flourish in employment? This is a fortunate convergence because the range of skills and qualities that employers need are exactly those that we all need in every day life. This is why this conference is so timely: we have a government for whom inclusivity is very, very high on their agenda, and we have a recognition in the business community that social cohesion matters, and that economic success depends on social cohesion to an extent.

To be more specific, there are a range of initiatives, known to some of you, on which we can build. The Chairman opened the conference by highlighting the fact that **Welfare to Work** started at 18+, but there is a great deal happening below that which is relevant to the children highlighted by this conference. Sir Ron Dearing's recommendations to the last government on 16 - 19 year old qualifications and learning, endorsed by the present government, was to treat 16 year olds+ as individuals and not treat them in a blanket way as, for example, Youth Trainees. Out of that came the more individualised, bespoke programmes such as **New Start** and the **National Traineeships**, mentioned by Brendon Barber, including the **Right to Study**. This states that a young person in work, has an entitlement to continue their education and training, which the CBI strongly supports. But what matters is that the young person asserts this entitlement, which I will come back to later. **Careers Guidance** has also been mentioned. It can come out as a bit of a Cinderella, as a token, or an after thought. I am convinced that it will become

the number one element in the success of many of these initiatives.

### Build On Good Practice

Listening to this morning after reflecting in preparation for today's conference, there may be a case for not needing to reinvent the wheel. There is much good practice. Links between education and business are one of the great UK success stories. We are in the vanguard and we should be proud. Over the last 20 years in a very modest, humble way, schools and businesses have been forging links. Around 92% of secondary schools in this country now have links with employers, ranging from employers in the governing body, employers involved in careers, teacher placements in business, the conventional work experience and perhaps more relevant to this audience, the mentoring schemes. In Walsall I know a number of businessmen have "adopted" particularly recalcitrant boys in a school and they see them once a month as their mentor with significant effects. I am sure there are many more good stories like that. TECs and LECs, have of course a very important infrastructure role here. But let me stress again what Bob Reid highlighted in the first presentation.

The need to guard against treating this group as a group and to focus above all on individuals. Unless we do that it won't work.

### Focus On Outcomes

What matters most is the desired outcomes, not so much the processes, because they will be so individualised. However much we try to avoid it, what matters are the **values and attitudes** of young people and employers. Employers need young people who have honesty, integrity, who pay attention to detail and have an ability to see things through to completion. Young people simply won't cope in a job if they do not have these values. But as one CBI member emphasised to me, "Margaret, we don't have skill shortages in Britain, but an attitude shortage. Give me a young person with the right attitude and it will be fine."

It is also essential to have the **basic and key skills**, and by the basic I mean in literacy and numeracy. If you work in retail and you know that you can't spell the shop window signs correctly, you feel pretty inadequate. If you don't have the confidence you ought to have, it matters. By the key skills I mean the range of personal skills needed for working with others and communicating articulately. **Career planning** does not need to be sophisticated, in its very essence the young person needs just to have a goal and know how to achieve it. As regards

**qualifications**, Brendon highlighted some sobering figures which matter and they are going to matter increasingly in the future. We need to become a qualified society. The infrastructure is there in terms of qualifications, but it needs to be accessed by the individual.

## Expectations

Charles Handy also said, that 90% of us go to the grave having used 10% of our talents. This is acutely relevant to young people leaving care. A number of employers have told me that they have taken on Youth Trainees with “nothing” and one such youth I heard of in Stockport is now at university. Unless we work

on a premise that our expectations are terribly low of ourselves, of each other, and of those people we know intimately, then we will never get to the heart of the problem.

Lastly, the “can do” mentality is perhaps one aspect of the solution that is relevant to good practice, management and the work force, as much as dealing with young people. The ideal outcome is an individual who says to him or herself, “I did this myself”, even though, in fact, there had been others and a support system helping that young person. If the young person thinks, I can do it, I did it myself, then I suggest that we have won.

## 7. Sir Christopher Harding, Chairman of Trustees, The Prince’s Youth Business Trust

After acknowledging how much the Foundation was committed to the welfare of children, Sir Christopher said that he intended to discuss the work of the Prince’s Youth Business Trust and what it plans to do in this its 21st year, and finally the important work, both in progress and planned, across the whole of The Prince’s Trust organisation, of which he was a Board member.

### The Prince’s Youth Business Trust

For eleven years, PYBT has helped disadvantaged young people to set up their own businesses. We deal with those young people who have failed to get funding and support from other sources, usually the banks, and are perhaps harshly referred to as “high risk”. We are, in fact, the lender of last resort. Usually these young people are out of work and have little or no business experience, but have a good idea and a clear vision of what they want to do. We offer the support, the business advice and the money to give them the chance, that all young people deserve to fulfil their true potential.

Our record speaks for itself. We have now given the chance to over 35,000 young people to realise their ideas and to secure their independence by setting up their own business. Due to the dedication of some 7,000 volunteer advisors who guide our young entrepreneurs through those early, difficult months of setting up a business, over 60% of these businesses are still trading after three years - a remarkable number.

I will give you a two examples:

Firstly, Dylan Wilkes set up a mail order business selling computer games with a £2,000 loan from the Trust in 1994, when he was 20 years old. He had previously worked for a mail order company which

sold fish food and pond pumps, and had been unemployed for three months. The company has grown rapidly since then. Last year it turned over £7.5 million. This year it is forecast to turn over £15 million. Dylan currently employs 29 staff and attributes his own success to their commitment and motivation. He believes his story shows young people can succeed in business regardless of background and with limited financial backing.

Secondly, Louise Wilkes (no relation to Dylan) is a female barber. Louise became a wheelchair user at the age of 18 after suffering a stroke. As a result she was out of work for several years. In 1991 she applied to the Prince’s Young Business Trust and was awarded a £1,500 grant to set up a barber’s shop. In June she was able to move from leased premises and buy her own shop. She now employs two part-time staff.

The most profitable ten businesses now have a turnover of around £39 million; the top 100 employ, on average, over fifteen people each, - a total of some 1,500 people who might otherwise be out of work themselves.

And in a way, good though those figures are, perhaps the best thing we offer to young people cannot be measured - real hope. Hope in knowing that someone will listen to them, will give them the benefit of sound advice, and will encourage them into business,

education or training. It gives them a chance to succeed if they have a belief in their own abilities and the practical support to make it possible. The move from dependence to independence is usually difficult. We aim to be there to help that transition and to present a human face whilst doing so. We are most emphatically **NOT** authority in disguise - we **ARE** willing to take risks with the young people we reach.

This is particularly true of those young people who have a care background. Here in particular if they are to be given the chance to succeed, much has to be taken on trust - on both sides.

## The 21<sup>st</sup> Anniversary Year of The Prince's Trust .

This year, one of our priorities will be the difficulties and welfare of young people leaving care. So why Care Leavers, you might ask? Our main concern has always been the young disadvantaged and we have made it our business to try to give them the opportunity to develop. Of course, we all know that there are plenty of young people who seem to have no aims and have already lost their way, their education poor, job prospects low, aspirations minimal, and hope non-existent, without picking a specific group. We see them in the ranks of the unemployed and of the homeless; on the streets of our cities and in the prison population. But young people from care figure disproportionately in **ALL** those areas. Others will give you the disturbing figures that graphically record the under-achievement of young people from care. I will give you just one figure. Around 80% of all young people leave education with some kind of formal qualification, but 80% of young people leave care with no qualifications at all. It just cannot be that they, as a group, are less able. It must surely be that, as a group, they are disadvantaged by the very system that we have put in place to support them.

You know it's often said that in many areas of endeavour there must be "a level playing field". To be honest with you, I've never really understood why there does have to be "a level playing field". In all the games I've ever played you simply change ends at half time, so that things even out. And I think **THIS** is the point about young people in care.

They have spent their young lives playing up-hill. They have had none of the opportunities or advantages that their contemporaries outside the care system have had. Their access to family and social support has been at best, limited, or sadly and often commonly, non-existent. It is reflected, as we are hearing regularly, in the very high levels of

educational under-achievement, unemployment, homelessness and criminality. It seems to me, that this is a problem that morally, as a society, we have failed to address or focus on properly, and for many of us in the business world, we have been unaware of the level of disadvantage that young people in care experience.

## The Prince's Trust

To go back to my sporting metaphor, the disadvantaged care leavers have been kicking up a very steep hill throughout the first half of their young lives. We at The Prince's Trust believe that it is time to redress the balance in their favour. Equity and our moral responsibility demands that we now redress that balance and those young care leavers get the advantage of kicking downhill. That is why we are trying to pull in extra resources specifically to help young people leaving care. Those resources can be money, education-related sponsorships and bursaries, work-related opportunities, housing, training or life skills support. It can come in the physical form of buildings or goods, or those less tangible things like advice and support.

We have started an initiative in The Prince's Trust that seeks to cover as many of the needs of young people leaving care as possible. We are doing this wherever possible by building on the experience and expertise of working with other organisations, and not just re-inventing the wheel or competing for the same scarce resources. We firmly believe that the consortium approach - the pooling of resources - is the best way forward, and that The Prince's Trust is also uniquely placed to form the bridge from the business world to the many organisations who see their role as directly delivering help to those in our society who are most in need.

## Initiatives in Co-operation

One thing that stands out from the information we have gathered at The Prince's Trust, is that the best way to help improve the situation for young people in care is by co-operating and working together.

Andrew Williamson will know that last year we asked all Local Authority Social Services Directors how we at The Prince's Trust could best help. Through work we did with The Who Cares? Trust, we issued an interesting report based on responses from the Directors, and free copies are available from The Prince's Trust. It told us of the great support there was for businesses to become more actively involved. It gave us information for the initiative that The Prince of Wales formally launched last year, at a seminar at Richmond House. We have spoken to many

organisation and others, some of whom will speak later in the conference. I've already mentioned The Who Cares? Trust and I would like to strongly endorse the valuable work they do. We have also talked to others here today: to the Caldecott Community: to Gordon D'Silva at Training for Life: and we have taken advice from the Association of Directors of Social Services itself. They have all been uniformly helpful and co-operative in giving advice on how best to work together in moving things forward.

For example, this summer we will be working with First Key, the national Care Leavers organisation, to establish a major new national event which we hope will be repeated annually. It will bring together those about to leave care, with businesses, educationalists, employment, housing and other specialists to provide them with real and tangible opportunities to improve their future prospects.

Today, may I encourage anyone who feels they have something to offer to Care Leavers, to get in touch with us at The Prince's Trust, or First Key. We want to build this event into a substantial occasion that will offer real hope to young people in care. This must be a real, combined effort from all interested parties. The After Care Consortium have already given the event their full backing and we all hope it will succeed.

I know I am not alone when I say that such co-operation holds the key to real and lasting progress. Co-operation is at the heart of our current work too. We are working with NCH Action for Children to set up a facility in Bristol, to which those who have just left care can turn. We are working with the Foyer Federation for Youth, of which I am a Board member, to see how best Foyers work with Social Services Departments, and also with the National Children's Bureau, together with the help and advice of colleagues at ADSS, we are running a two year plan that looks at better ways to establish support programmes for those about to leave care.

### **The Significant Adult**

Finally may I return to the research we have done and tell you about another key area, although it is not new. This is the importance of a "significant adult" in the lives of all young people. The beneficial influence of a positive and supportive adult is well

documented in the effect it has on young people. Together with a substantial donation from the Camelot Foundation to start things off, we have recently begun a three year programme specifically addressing this area for care leavers. Our aim will be to seek to ensure that by the year 2000 **ALL** young people leaving care will have access to someone to help, support and advise them when they leave care.

I know that "mentoring" is a buzz word at the moment. But whether we call that person a mentor, a friend, a counsellor, a supporter or whatever, the important point is that there is someone trustworthy to whom they can turn. And that person can give them the help, advice and support that is all too often missing from the lives of those who have been in care.

I strongly believe that in today's society, we have a moral duty, as "corporate parents" if you like, to treat these disadvantaged young people as we would wish our own children to be treated.

We ask a great many things of Social Services on our behalf and I believe we owe it to them to ensure that we take some responsibility ourselves. Society as a whole needs to share in looking out for those young people who, almost entirely through no fault of their own, have had none of the advantages of an early life in a loving, safe and supportive environment. I believe it is not only our moral duty to address these difficulties and find solutions, but our clear responsibility to today's society **and** to future generations.

We have to ensure as best we can that more help, more support and more resources are channelled into helping young people in care for the next chapter in their lives, to give them the opportunities that have so far been denied to them. With co-operation, consultation and a little more effort I believe we can bring together sufficient resources to ensure that by the year 2000, young people leaving care will do so with some hope and optimism for their future. If they do not do so, we will yet again have failed them and failed in our duty to look after them. We will also be ignoring the enormous pool of talent, skills and ability that is simply going to waste. Young people leaving care have much to offer us - we must ensure that they have the opportunities to show just how good they can be.

## 8. Building Partnerships: Making it Work

Annie Shepperd, Director of Housing and Social Services, Bath & N.E. Somerset Council

The basis of Annie Shepperd's presentation was to look at what she and her colleagues knew from research, what they, as a local authority, needed to be doing for young people who were looked after, and to understand the critical pathways that young people took in their career in care, and the choices that they made. The choices that adults made limited their access to the community resources that most people in our society took for granted and enjoyed. We could see that for young people looked after, the outcomes they experienced were an under-representation in further and higher education, an over-representation in those who are unemployed, and we had also heard today of their over-representation in homelessness and in the prison population.

### Education

Bath and North East Somerset is a small unitary authority, taken out of Avon, and this year we have carried out a brief analysis of what has happened to the care leavers since April 1997. During this period we had 16 people who were leaving care, only one of whom took 'A' levels, and of the 25 young people who are currently being looked after, aged 16-18, only 3 are studying for 'A' levels. What is quite clear is that for young people in the care system, access to higher education is being denied. Assumptions made as to why this might be, are: low expectations by social workers, low expectations by schools, problems of studying in school, and a variety of other suggestions. In our analysis of the 16 who left care, we have 7 who are in employment, of whom 6 who are also in further education, and 7 who are unemployed,

### Preparing For After Care

In Bath and North East Somerset we have some 50% unemployment amongst looked after children. Now, under the banner of 'work after/looked after' we have begun to consider doing things differently, in an effort to address some of the critical pathways of looked after young people. We have invested in a leaving care specialist service, which recognises the need to prepare children for leaving care and to have a post-care service. In addition, we have invested in the "New Deal - Welfare to Work" initiative, and are the only public service at this stage in Bath and North East Somerset, that has formed a positive partnership with the employment service to investigate the subsidised employment opportunities under the New

Deal. We also know that we have to improve the education attainment of looked after children in such a way that they become more employable. They must be taught skills which prepare them to approach the new environment of work and also to be able to enjoy this employment in their adult lives.

### Employment

Under the 'New Deal - Welfare to Work' we have reminded ourselves that the Local Authority is one of the largest employers in our area. Consequently, we have set employment targets within the Local Authority for New Deal, by setting individual targets for each of the Directorates into which we are organised. We have also given targets to Directorates to establish mentors for young people. Since you really do need commitment from senior management within the Authority for this to be successful, we are targeting senior managers to take on these mentoring roles. This approach has the added advantage that other local employers will also employ care leavers, because they will see that they are able to contribute to their business. Bath and North East Somerset have set a target for next year of offering 17 posts, not just to care leavers, but to young people in general. These posts will be permanent and we will also invest in supporting the young person, their immediate manager, their team and their mentor. We hope this initiative will also encourage the local community to be supportive of similarly employing more young people.

### Local Partnerships

As far as our local partnership goes, the Chamber of Commerce is very much at the centre. We have been working closely with them on other initiatives that have helped demonstrate that we are serious about partnerships, in our Authority. This has included winning money under the Rough Sleepers Initiative, and in taking steps to improve Community Safety. We are recognising that, to have a real partnership, we have to take seriously the problems that our partners face. We are aiming to persuade local employers to begin helping us, by giving young people employment on Saturday's, during school holidays, or other part-time employment, in order that they can gain work experience that at the moment appears quite inaccessible to them. Local businesses should also begin to see the benefit. We have demonstrated, through our work with the Police and

other organisations, that we are often dealing with the same young people that cause problems with criminal activities, as family and community support becomes more difficult and they are often excluded from school. What we can do, to begin to solve some of these problems in our society, is to target the improved educational and personal skills of these young people and look to their employment opportunities as a means of building for their future.

This year, we are also engaging in further services to voluntary organisations, by providing advocacy for young people which will help them particularly with some of their housing needs. I think that what has come out of this phase is, When the our Employment Service interviewed young people in pubs, youth

clubs, and in other places where they meet, about employment opportunities, there appeared are a whole menu of needs. However one need that came over very strongly was transport to work, where the high costs of public transport makes everything seems like a problem, and this needs addressing. A different type of challenge, is establishing the right partnership with a local voluntary organisation which has a gym in the City, which could be useful in getting young people fit for work, and that would be another added benefit for this group as they begin to take their strides into adult life and employment. What we have found in our analysis so far, and are beginning to address, is that it is vital to tackle a whole menu of needs, if our Welfare to Work initiative is to really make a difference.

## Lord Haslam introduced the next speakers, who addressed the issue of the Development of Children’s Potential.

### 9. Susanna Cheal, The Who Cares? Trust

During her talk, she laid much stress on the need to develop the potential of children, both in care and leaving care. By helping them to work out what goals and dreams they hope to achieve, together with appropriate help and support, there is no reason why they cannot become self fulfilled and contributing members of society; socially included rather than on the outside looking in.

“A child is like a blank book. Your parents are the authors”.

This comment from a young person in care struck me for its simplicity and its message. The child feels helpless, in a world of adults who control his destiny. This reflects what is actually happening to the majority of the 60,000 children in public care, despite the best efforts of many devoted professionals and carers, who put in so much work to help our young people on an individual basis. Together we now have a greater opportunity to enhance the life of each child in care and to be much more responsive to their needs.

As their corporate parents, local authorities might say that removal to care in the first place, spells out major difficulties at the start of each child’s book. But once a decision has been taken to place a child in residential or foster care, there is a role for every organisation represented here today to build on the strengths of that child and to contribute to the subsequent chapters in the book. Importantly, together we can offer a much more active role to children in shaping their own destiny, so that they feel more involved in preparing for their future. This will help them achieve

their true potential, so that their story has a more positive ending.

This is the current destiny awaiting the majority of the 8,000 or so 16-18 year olds leaving care this year, if nothing is done:-

- 15-40% estimated to be ‘not attending school’ (Audit Commission 1994)
- 12% not attending regularly, rising to 25% in Year 11 (SSI/Ofsted 1995)
- 45% not entered for GCSEs
- 35% no career interview (Humberside 1995)
- 55% no work experience }
- 56% no National Record of Achievement }
- Up to 75% leave school with no qualifications (Biehal 1992, Garnett 1992)

Some of these statistics are well known, especially the last. Before disbanding, Humberside looked internally at the achievements of its young people and found poor results. We cannot count on every

authority being willing to follow this idea, since knowing where their children are, what sort of qualifications they've got, and what might happen to them next, is not necessarily on their agenda. As one young person said to me, "I know my social worker doesn't even know I've got "A" Levels. He said, Oh I thought you were on an Access Course." This young person had studied hard for his "A" Levels, just as our own children do, but with little support and with no congratulations, not even from his social worker. Now I am not blaming all social workers, but we all need this awareness to take on board the vital need for education.

## Opportunities

Referring to the statistics above, the first two really alarm me and warrant further discussion. Why are 15-40% estimated to be not attending school and 12% not attending regularly? Much talk has centred on how young people can benefit from better access to education, but they cannot if they are not there!

Every major body, The Department of Health, The Social Services Inspectorate, The Audit Commission, and Ofsted has documented the failure of care on many levels. The Utting report 'People Like Us', already mentioned, shows a way forward and is distinctive for its genuine attempt to involve young people. Despite the care and attention of many people, we are dealing with an inappropriate system that is letting children down. We are staggered at The Who Cares? Trust, that our links with 25,000 children show such a laissez faire attitude towards some of our most vulnerable children and such low expectations of them.

*We do not need one more piece of written evidence about what is wrong with care, it is everywhere, let's do something about it, let's implement action.*

Through the Trust's work on Who Cares?, the national magazine for 25,000 young people in care, through the telephone Linkline and through our development work across education, health, preparation for employment, the development of lifeskills and disability, we witness a great waste of untapped talent, resourcefulness and admirable spirit in the face of enormous odds. We have not met one person who does not want to make a success of life. Yet they do not even know if they are allowed to have aspirations, because they are made to feel 'different' because of their care experience.

If we want to develop the potential of our care population we have to deal with the obstacles we put in their way; obstacles above and beyond the normal hurdles other children face and can only be seen by unpicking what's happening in care and listening to what the children say. We must give our children in care the same opportunities offered to children living at home as a matter of course. But in order to ensure

social inclusion there are areas of development that need special attention and the first of those is domestic stability and I mentioned that in a question earlier. That awful thought that somehow it is okay to have three moves a year when you are a child. I mean, could you have survived? I think I would have been a basket case if I had been moving fifteen times, which isn't uncommon.

## Education

"Education is a passport to another kind of life", Professor Sonia Jackson said one of our Trustees. With the figures shown above, it is no surprise that up to 50% of young care leavers are unemployed or not working. Without adequate qualifications they will have difficulty in accessing further and higher education and in accessing suitable training courses which have minimum entry requirements. We need a strategic approach to lifting attainment, such as we are trying with two pilot authorities, Bradford and Brighton and Hove, who are determined that social services and education will work together to help their care population to succeed. We need to be absolutely sure that those who have the care of children in their day to day life rate education as something really worth having, which does not always seem to be the case.

We need our children to learn how to gain self confidence, how to make friends, how to make decisions, how to deal with different social situations, how to negotiate and sustain relationships and even how to find information for themselves. Children in settled families seem more able to acquire these attributes by living at home, whilst children in care often lack this opportunity. Our Lifeskills Programme aims to develop their self esteem and sense of well-being and to show what they **can** do, by providing practical experience and materials for young people, carers and professionals.

## Continued Support

One of the worst aspects of care facing young people, is the barrier to continuing support from their local authority - their corporate parents, who are supposed to be looking after them. You probably have a family celebration when your children get GCSEs. You would never say you cannot support them any further! We have so many calls on the Linkline about post-16 education and the difficulties in progressing further academically. This is a typical discussion, "I am in foster care, I've got GCSEs," (and we breathe a sigh of relief and say thank God for that). Question - "I've got a place at college but the local authority wants to change my carers and I don't think the new place is going to pay for my grant. What should I do?" We are not talking about a group that isn't motivated or naturally disaffected, we are talking about a group that is blocked in trying to achieve its potential.

Just last week we heard about a young girl with three “A” levels, wondering what on earth to do with her life, having been told by her social worker that she could not go to university because she was in care! That was simply untrue and fortunately that young woman is now on her way to university, but we all realise the devastating effect that this statement can have on a vulnerable teenager. Her experience is telling, when you realise that only 1 in 300 young people from care goes to university compared with the Government’s far more ambitious aims for all young people. The point here is not about lack of talent, there is plenty of that: it is about commitment to seeing our young people through their education, to help them break out of the cycle of care and dependency and into a career of choice and a more fulfilling life.

## Preparation for Work

Children in care who are encouraged to develop at school are rare enough, but even if they do succeed it’s no good sending them into the world of work unprepared for what to expect. However, a simple but common experience for young people, whose only significant adult contact may have been with professional staff, is to understand that when an employer asks “How are you?”, he does not expect a long social services type of reply. Without preparation, young people can be bewildered as to why they cannot cope at work and make new relationships and wonder why people are looking at them in a funny way. Nobody has told them what is expected at work.

This preparation for life outside care has to be thought about and planned carefully, well ahead of their time to leave. We can do a much better job if we think, “...what we would want for our own children?” We need practice that is consistent with good child development, with much more vigorous management and training to deliver the right quality of care. The better trained the workers are, the less challenging the behaviour we are going to have from our young people.

## Attitudes and Expectations

Finally, we should all play a part in changing attitudes towards those in care, of whom 99% are admitted through family breakdown, rather than anything they have done. Our 1994 MORI research on attitudes to children in care revealed two depressing findings: firstly that employers, given two candidates with equal qualifications for a job, would not take a risk on the care leaver (*although we know that that care leaver would have had to try much harder to be eligible*) and secondly, on the whole, parents would

not let their children play with a child from care.

These negative perceptions and low expectations hurt children in care, and they write to us daily about this aspect of their care experience which comes through more and more and more.

“People think that all kids are in care because they’re disruptive hooligans and are mentally disturbed but we’re just like the rest. We’re normal kids doing normal things.”

I have to write to challenge many television programmes who use children in care as a convenient dramatic device to explain away all sorts of criminal happenings in the story. Young people are terribly upset after seeing such programmes on television.

Local Authorities are probably the largest employers in a local area, and although budgets are tight, you have immense resources in kind - for work experience, for work shadowing, and work placement. These resources and contacts could be used to help with the stepping stones to employability.

I urge employers to look on the positive aspects about employing young people. These people in care can give you a wealth of positive qualities: an ability to manage oneself through change, (15 moves in care is not uncommon), resilience in the face of adversity, managing on limited information, adaptability, teamwork in the children’s home and potential communication skills. These are key competencies for tomorrow’s company, even for the boardroom. This has been proved by The Prince’s Youth Business Trust!

To help our young people achieve their potential we need to invest time and commitment - it is not just an opportunity, it is our moral duty. The talents of our care population are as rich and diverse as any you would find among your own children, but they need that extra support to become included in society. We must trust young people and work with them to develop their education, which too many are not getting, even though it is their right under the law. We should change this crazy artificial cut off point at 16, which signals the beginning of coping entirely alone, simply because the duty on local authorities becomes a discretionary power which many refuse to use. We must make sure care leavers have somewhere to return to for help and support and provide for further education.

When we read the final chapter in the book, this is what we want it to say:-

“They helped me. I felt cared about. I’m on my way. Now I can leave care behind”.

## 10. Terry Lee, Principal, Jacques Hall Therapeutic Community

Lord Haslam introduced Terry Lee as the real instigator of the conference, and one who played a large part in its planning. His presentation was to be linked to that of Simon Rodway, since they would both be talking from a similar standpoint.

I feel that my main aim is to “sell” these children to you, by highlighting their many strengths, some of which had already been extolled. It is so easy for us to actually forget what it is like to be a child, so, like Susanna Cheal, I have a quote from a child, which I hope will make you reflect on the inner strengths that these children have in order to survive their experiences. Ask yourselves, would you have shown those same strengths?

The first is a letter that I received from a girl I have been looking after, and she called it “Growing Up”.

*“I was born on the 10th December 1972 in the North of England, where I would have spent the rest of my future. When my real dad found that my mother was pregnant, he ran off with another woman. Eventually, she became my step-mother.*

*When my brother was born, my mother kept on going to the hospital to see him. Every day my dad used to sleep during the day and at night time he used to go to the pub and drink. Then he would come back and kick the shit out of us until we were bleeding.*

*Afterwards, my mother kicked him out and then my mother met this bastard, Peter. He was big and very strong, and they fell in love and got married, but didn't have any kids, thank God. When Peter had had enough with my mum, he decided to have a bit of fun and sexually assaulted me and my brother as well which I thought was even more insane.*

*After that, I went into care. The bastard of a step-dad got away with it anyway. The judge said that I was only in care until I was 16 years old unless there was a reason for keeping me in. My mother divorced him and was on her own for a couple of months until Simon came along. He was another bastard as well. Here is what happened.*

*He used to make me and my brother each cat shit. I don't know why and also he cut all my brother's hair off and had to go to school like that. He used to push us around. That's it really with this bastard.*

*I went to foster-parents called Mr and Mrs Field. I stayed with them for about one year. I got too friendly towards the foster dad and he sexually assaulted me on my bedroom floor, and then just walked out as if nothing had happened.*

*I ran away to London but didn't get very far. I decided to turn myself in. Then I came to a children's home and stayed there for I'm not sure how long. Afterwards, I went somewhere else.*

*I know my mother is happy. She is living with a man called Jim and is going to marry him soon. Personally, I think he's a very nice man”.*

This second story consists of excerpts from a file that I recently received about a 12 year old girl that was being referred to Jacques Hall.

Julie first came to the attention of Social Services at aged 20 months when a referral was made suggesting that Julie had suffered non-accidental injuries. On examination at the Children's Hospital, the following injuries were noted:

- bruising of the upper edge of each external ear;
- two large diffuse bruises over the forehead;
- bruise on left upper eye;
- red mark over right temple;
- bruise at outside corner of right eye;
- graze on cheek below right eye;
- bite mark on right forearm, 5cms in diameter
- large bruise extending over both buttocks;
- finger mark bruising over left upper rear thigh;
- two healed blisters on dorsum of right foot;
- linear burn 6cm x 0.5cm on right upper rear thigh below buttock.

The bruises were of differing ages between two and seven days. The burns were said to be between three and four days old.

At 3 years of age, the report includes “specific difficulties” were identified around bath-times and a fear of her genitals being hurt; temper tantrums at mealtimes; sexual kisses; interest in her own and others' genitals; aggression towards herself and shouting out, “No” in the night.

Further concern was felt about comments Julie made about being hurt by, ‘Mummy’; a negative attitude to

Ms Smith; ambivalent feelings towards her father; comments about and demonstrations of being held down and of her stomach being pressed; comments about being held down by her father whilst he touched her vagina and of being held down by her father and Ms Smith whilst they did not have any clothes on, and her father's face being 'wet'; comments about being tied up by the 'woman' and the 'witch mummy'; comments about her 'bottom' being hurt by fingers, hands and a stick, sometimes referred to as a 'witches stick' or a 'thingy'.

It is important to recognise that I work with children who have been particularly traumatised, but they have this inner strength to survive these experiences. Unfortunately these are relatively common details for me to read in the referral papers that we receive on children. I founded Jacques Hall as a therapeutic community for children such as this in 1987 and during that time, 90 children have passed through our doors during a period that has seen massive changes within the structures of Health, Social Services and Education.

One such change for our children, is that it is extremely rare now for us to have a placement at Jacques Hall supported by the local authority beyond a child's sixteenth birthday, mainly because of genuine financial restraints, which we accept. Prior to this, the task was difficult enough when we used to be able to work with children until they were 18, rehabilitating them back into the community. Now, although we continue to attempt this, it is very difficult, since we are expected to do semi-independent work with children of 15 and a half years of age.

Independence is an easy word to throw around and maybe it is something to work towards. However, my wife would say that I have never been independent in my life and I work hard to ensure this. I am very dependent on many people, and I think we have to question full independence as a concept. I certainly feel that what we are attempting to do with a 15 ½ year old child is not correct and I would not attempt it with my own child. The average age for leaving home in the UK, is around 23, and that's increasing. Everyone needs a great deal of support and to have the opportunity, when mistakes are made, to return to a secure base. My own career took three attempts before I got it correct, and I don't think that is an uncommon experience for many adults. These children are often expected to get it right the first time, otherwise we discard them as troublesome, or as failures. I think we use dehumanising phrases like "problems of disaffection", and "children who have been marginalised", to protect ourselves from the real pain. The effects of not seeing these people through a very difficult period of their lives can, as

already stated, result in the homelessness which often leads on to drugs and prostitution and crime.

Residential care is a very expensive resource, especially as we strive to improve our standards all the time. It is clear that society has positively and carefully taken on a public parenting role with such children. I therefore feel that society has a moral obligation to these children, that none of us can walk away from, that goes beyond their period of care. This includes the corporate and industrial sectors of the community that have so much to offer to these often lonely and frightened young people.

The experience of myself and others is that when individuals and organisations are prepared to both understand and invest in these children, they respond with great loyalty, from a deep inherent wish to be loved, accepted and to belong. Employment opportunities have so much to offer these children and I believe it is a very cost-effective investment for society to make in order that these young people can become positive contributors to society.

Children in care, through no fault of their own, have often experienced inconsistent education and many, therefore, cannot produce a satisfactory CV which allows them to be short-listed for job interviews. I was talking to Robbie McGregor from Rolls Royce this morning who feels it is far better to have somebody with the right attitude who can learn, than somebody who has knowledge but doesn't have the right attitude. Susanna Cheal referred to some of the skills that these children have:

- coping with stress: these children are experts
- management of change: we're all amateurs by comparison
- problem solving: they know all about that
- adaptability: they are well practised
- creativity: this maybe the greatest skill that that they possess. They are some of the most creative children you could ever wish to meet.

Everyone of you could spend time in a room with these children and thoroughly enjoy their company. Why cannot we employ them?

I can reiterate that organisations and individuals who are willing to invest in these children will reap the rewards. With the support, the education, the training, you will end up with a very loyal employee, that is my experience in my relationship with these children. My wish, therefore, is that the people who have kindly attended today, and other corporate and industrial organisations, give their name to an initiative that, in partnership with providers of residential care, would provide greater access to employment opportunities than currently exists for these children.

## 11. Simon Rodway OBE

### The Caldecott Community

Simon Rodway said he would talk very briefly about the practical efforts taken to help young people leaving care from the Caldecott Community, a therapeutic community for severely damaged children. Caldecott was started in 1911 and he had been involved for 47 years, since he first went to work there as a young House Master.

He maintained that the National issues concerning what happened to young people leaving care and how best to prepare them for moving out, into the community, remain essentially unresolved, even after many years.

### Support Networks

For many years staff at the Caldecott Community have had good informal links with young people who have left. Apart from the wide network of continuing care provided by existing staff, and informally by former staff, there has also been important contact through groups of young people themselves who have supported each other. However, this is something that we really have not done enough about. I am sure people here can tell us of many instances where young people have helped other young people after leaving care. At Caldecott, we have found that there are groups of young people, boys and girls, even men and women in their 30's and 40's who have been at Caldecott, who continue to support each other and their families right the way through. Many of them return to visit us regularly and every other year we have a Reunion, attended by about 200 people who have either been on the staff or have been boys and girls at Caldecott. Many of the therapeutic communities with which I am involved through the Charterhouse Group, of which I am Chairman, have developed similar informal links with men and women who have been at their communities.

However, this aftercare network has been very haphazard, and many young people have not had the opportunities that they should have, had we had a more systematic professional throughcare service. Many of us have realised the need to develop a skilled service for those people leaving care, to demonstrate, that as good parents we will offer them help when they seek it, or we will enable them to find appropriate help elsewhere. For some years Caldecott has struggled to establish how best to prepare those leaving our Community and how best we can support them afterwards. Richard White commented that the quality of preparation for those leaving care is usually very poor and I'm afraid that this has been the case in the past.

### The Throughcare Service

We have now established a very successful

Throughcare Service under the direction of Mick McCarthy, our Throughcare Manager, and his staff. The service offers **unconditional** support, to all our young people leaving Caldecott, and relationships are built from the age of 14, between Throughcare staff and the young people, so that it can continue once the young person has left the Community. I think it is extremely important for the aftercare process to start while the young person is still in care and then continues once the person has left. In this way the relationship is built, not on a role that is established by an aftercare worker after the person has left, but it is a relationship fostered during care so that the young person is not frightened to go on seeking advice from that person after they leave. We believe that if you can establish this type of relationship with the young people before crises develop, then the service becomes essentially a preventative one, and has better outcomes.

A very worrying point made by Richard White, and Allan Levy, is that local authorities are unable to continue to provide support after the age of 21, and they will only be able to provide care, if the child seeking it was looked after by the local authority after the age of 16. I am not seeking to blame Social Services, for when I was a Director of Social Services, the social workers in my department did not have the time to continue looking after young people if they left care at the age of 16, due to taking on new clients. I understand all that, but in my view it is absolutely essential that local authorities do all they can to tackle this problem in the future.

### Outreach Services

In order to minimise the often damaging and traumatic effects of a young person's transition into the adult world, we feel it is most important to involve them in establishing the best sort of service we should provide. Their most striking responses centre around the effects of loneliness, the absence of stable adult support and how unprepared they feel for independence when they have come from a very protective community. They

don't feel ready for that independence and sometimes they are reluctant to seek support and so feel rejected. Leaving care plans for these young people must be part of a continuum of care, where their present and future history should dovetail together, if we are to guard them against the dangers they face when they go out into cities. For some years, at our base in Ashford, Kent, we have given support to our leavers through an Outreach Service, which has provided accommodation and also a drop-in centre. Also, through a partnership between Caldecott and The Peabody Trust, we have now provided a drop-in centre at the Drury Lane Foyer in London, where young people living in the city can call in and receive help, or just go in and have a coffee and a chat if they need to.

All young people leaving the Community are provided with guidelines for obtaining help when they leave. We are in the throes of developing our Throughcare Service further and we have been able to appoint additional staff through the generous support of a large national charitable Trust. Through a fund set up to recognise the work of our Founder Leila Rendel, we are also able to provide some financial support to young people who have left, which continues right through their lives. We are able to make grants and loans and it is administered by three of us who are Trustees of the Community and we give support to many people who have left, not only people who have recently left but people in their 40's, 50's, even 60's. Now they are all given a leaflet about this fund when they leave so that they know that if they have immediate financial problems, they will receive help. We even give financial help, not only to young people to start in business, but to

support young people who have need of therapeutic care with a psychotherapist etc.

We believe that there is benefit in sharing these services with other communities, and our Throughcare Manager is exploring the possibility of making similar provisions available to them. Although there are obvious difficulties, particularly with other communities starting the preparation work before their young people leave, but that is something that we have to work out. We are also liaising with the National Children's Bureau, who are looking at good practice relating to young people leaving care and their transition to adult life. One of the objectives of their mentoring scheme, which we heard a great deal about this morning, is to provide an adult mentor and friend from business, education or other social settings, for each young person who has been looked after by the local authority and who qualifies for support. James Cathcart has provided some literature about those schemes and I was glad that Sir Christopher Harding mentioned our liaison with The Prince's Youth Trust.

It is a great sadness that the wonderful work carried out by many therapeutic communities, who continue to help those young people when they leave care, has been handicapped by a lack of resources. It is tragic to see how distressed and lonely these young people can be, when they do not have the necessary support after leaving care. I am sure many of us here have seen that. We have started to tackle this problem and are in the throes of developing our services further. We are also keen to share our experiences with other people in what we believe is a dynamic and essential programme of care.

## **12. Ben Rose and a Volunteer Youth At Risk**

In introducing Ben Rose, a lawyer, from Youth At Risk, Lord Haslam mentioned that his wife Elizabeth had spent a few days in the Lake District, on one of their courses, and was both moved and exited by the experience and the positive effect it had on the young people.

Ben Rose firstly thanked everybody from the Sieff Foundation for the opportunity to speak about Youth at Risk. Whilst sitting in the audience, he had wondered what it was that had motivated so many people to give up a day in their busy lives to attend the conference. He knew that we all felt a huge commitment, involving all aspects of our lives, to try and make a difference to disadvantaged young people. He also felt that we all shared frustration in our inability to do enough to break the vicious cycle of deprivation, offending and further deprivation.

There is much skills based work taking place, with enormously committed people, concerning youth literacy, filling in CVs, education and jobs etc. This is an incredibly important part of the picture, but for me it is only half the picture. It is the other half of the picture, about who we are as human beings in this project called life, that Youth At Risk tries to address. In our fairly powerful and unique way, we complement the skills based work provided by others.

## The Youth At Risk Programme

We are usually called in by a local authority, or a private company, to see if our different approach can help with a difficult situation, and an in-depth partnership is established with staff at all levels.

In the first phase of the year long programme, we work with them to produce the ground work for what takes place in the forthcoming programme. This also entails enrolling and training volunteers in an intensive programme, similar to that used for the young people themselves.

The second phase is the residential part, when we try, in a powerful, fairly confrontational and radical way to change the life of the young people. For many of these youngsters, life is no surprise, their life pattern often moves along seemingly predictable lines - homelessness, drugs, alcohol, prison and sometimes death. We provide an opportunity for them to see that their past does not have to determine their future, and that they have a choice.

The third phase of the programme is the Follow Through Programme, which lasts for 9 months. During this time a new community is born. The young people who originally came from a community that was not committed to them winning, succeeding, being happy, fulfilled, or able to give and receive love, changes during those nine months to a community that is now fully committed to those same young people. A win win relationship is created between every individual within the Youth at Risk programme and also Youth at Risk and its agencies.

We have been delivering programmes up and down the country now since 1992, and by and large the results have been quite extraordinary. For example, in our oldest programme in the London Borough of Enfield, of the 35 young people who participated, 40% had a track record of fairly heavy duty crime, muggings, robberies with knives and so forth. Many had been in prison, and had used drugs and alcohol. The local Chief Inspector, of the police with whom we worked, predicted that these 35 young people, during the 12 month programme, would go on to commit 400 more offences! We understand that to date only 3 of those young people have gone on to commit further crimes.

Now, we know the **huge** amount of resource that goes into the criminal justice system, compared to the pittance of a resource that goes into the sort of work that my colleagues have addressed at this conference.

To give you a taster of what Youth at Risk is about, I thought it would be useful to listen to my colleague who took part in the first Youth at Risk programme in 1993, when she was 17 years old, after being in

care for a number of years. She is now 22 and is a totally different person to the one who walked into the Youth at Risk programme 5 years ago. For me, she had the heroism and courage to stand and face her own demons, and that is why I asked her to talk today as a consumer of the services about which we've heard.

## A Young Person's Story

"Firstly I would like to say I am really really nervous. My name is ..... and I came on the programme because at 14 I was raped by my boss, I was working in a newsagents as a shop assistant junior. I was also sexually abused by my dad and I was also sexually abused by my uncle, and that started when I was 4. My dad was also quite drunk, he used to be quite violent and threatening and he was under the psychiatric unit. I had threats, that my pet pig would be killed if this didn't happen, I got told I was stupid, that I wasn't worth anything, that I was just, excuse my language, that I was just a piece of shit basically. I ended up self mutilating and I attempted suicide because I didn't think my life was worth living, I didn't want to live anymore. What was the point, nobody else really hoped or cared for me, what else was there left for me.

Fortunately, I did go into care. I mean there were bits of care that were really shit because of the things that happened. As a result I started to drink heavily, I didn't have any self confidence, I had no self respect. I went to Youth at Risk as a victim. I was living out my life being a victim and that wasn't giving me any possibility.

The good side of being in care was, that I was out of the situation that I had been in. However, one social worker did really show me that I was worth something by introducing me to a Youth at Risk programme and taking me along to a presentation.

I chose to do the programme, it was a commitment for me which was one of the toughest things that I have ever done in my life and it is probably the toughest thing that I will ever do in my life. I actually took a look to see where I was at and I began to take responsibility in acknowledging and facing up that I was making myself be a victim and by being that victim, I was just generating things that would have me be in the same place, of being the victim continuously and not getting out anywhere. Not getting the things that I had dreams about getting.

On the residential, for one of the first times I felt love and care and supported and even though I was in a foster family, and there was love and care there, but it was like this is still not my family, this is not my home, this is somebody else's home that I am living

in, this is not really mine. So for me that was like, yea, sure, but at Youth at Risk there was an unconditional love, unconditional support, it was non judgmental, it was like, this is us and we are here to support you no matter what and we won't give up on you even if you give up on yourself, we are still going to be there because we have committed to you and having you have a worthwhile future because that is what Youth at Risk believes that all young people have a worthwhile future.

In the 9 months Follow Through, I learnt not to let fear stop me, which it had done in the past, in a lot of places. I did the 9 months Follow Through programme and I got support from the community of volunteers that were there and I had somebody called a Committed Partner supporting me and I worked on the tools that I learnt that I could use to empower my life and that helped in the community.

During that 9 months, as I said, people were just there for me and if I wanted to talk for 3 hours I could talk for 3 hours, if I wanted to cry, I could cry, if I wanted to ask for a cuddle, I could have a cuddle. With social services, in a way for me, going back to that, it was like your social worker saw you for an hour and an hour only, it is like yea your hour is up now, see you next week. And I could be really hurting inside and I wouldn't be allowed to share my feelings with the social worker because what was the point for me. So, Youth at Risk, even in the Follow Through programme was a really important part of my life to have that experience that is something that is out there that I can get myself into.

Since doing the programme I have got self confidence, self respect, I couldn't stand up here 4 years ago and talk to you, I couldn't look anybody in the eye. I have gained all of my self confidence, my self respect, I don't have any suicidal thoughts, I haven't self mutilated for years, I've got control of my drinking problem that I had. I have since left care, which was actually quite a traumatic experience for me and, unlike children with parents if I fuck up I can loose my home, and where do I go, I am homeless. If

somebody else fucks up they can go back to their parents, you know. So at times I still find that hard and I am working on that but I am in independent living now, I think I've got a beautiful flat, I think it is beautiful, and I mean my confidence as far as that goes, I've learnt how to swim when I was 18, I didn't know how to swim, I didn't think I could know how to swim and I now know how to swim. I went back to college, I've got my GCSEs, I've done a Diploma in Child Care, I've also just completed a NVQ Level 1 in Business Administration and I am now currently doing my Level 2 in the same subject and hopefully I will be finishing that in March. I was in part time employment with the local authority for a little while, working with children and then I turned that into working full time for Youth at Risk, in an office Monday to Friday and they day release me to do my NVQ. I am getting on better with my sister, I'm just feeling so much more powerful within myself, I am feeling better, I can now say that I am an amazing person and I am a powerful person and I've got a future worth having and I am like giving this out to other young people that I see.

Like on the programmes, that if I emulate this out to those young people that they'll get an experience of what I got and that's what I think the Youth at Risk community does. I am not a victim anymore and I do things now and I can distinguish like, instead of me messing around it is like a mistake got made, I made mistakes, social services made mistakes, my psychiatrist once wanted to put me into a, I don't know if you have every heard of it, a Henderson Hospital which is to give up my flat, it was to give up everything to go and live in this place to be in therapy and she was threatening me to go in there if I didn't do certain things for her. So it is like those were things that didn't work and now I can say, okay, those didn't work, but instead of going into that role, like they didn't work so what can I do differently, what else can I do, what can I get support in and that is what I feel I can get from Youth at Risk, but also generate that myself to have the future that I want. And that is all that I would like to say and thank you very much for listening to me".

### **13. Fran Russell,**

#### **Howard League for Penal Reform**

The Howard League, began Fran Russell, was established in 1866, to campaign for constructive measures to rehabilitate offenders, rather than just punish them. This approach came from a concern for society as a whole as well as for the victims, because if offenders were not rehabilitated, more victims would be created. They have tried, she continued, by the use of their own research, to influence Government policy. Last year they produced a report on young girls, aged between 15 and 17, who are kept in adult prisons alongside adult offenders, with an unsuitable regime which provided little real hope of their being rehabilitated. A new report, about young boys held in Feltham Young Offenders Institute, has just been passed on to the Children's Society.

## Children In Prison

We have already heard that a high proportion of children in prison have been through the care system. Unfortunately there are no Government figures on this issue, but last year during our research on those teenage girls mentioned, from an interview of over 80% of the teenage girls being held in prison at that time, 40% had been in care. A recent report by The Chief Inspector of Prisons suggested a figure of around 50%. So it is a very clear route, care - prison. Contrary to the commonly held view, that children who end up in prison are bad and evil and a dose of good discipline will sort them out, in fact, they are very damaged children who have been through care and are in need of support and understanding, not discarding.

In reality, the majority of children in prison have a very similar profile to children who have been in care. They have been abused, perhaps, sexually and physically, and their misuse of alcohol and drugs lies very much behind their offending behaviour. They have had poor parental supervision, in fact they have often lost their parents through separation or death, a large majority of them have been excluded from school, and of course they have very, very low self-esteem. Basically, they have been let down by the system and when they go to prison, they continue to be let down.

## The Prison Environment

Contrary to what many people think, young offender institutions are not child centred institutions, they are prisons run by the prison service. Young offenders may also go into adult jails, and teenage girls are actually put in with adult offenders. If young boys go to adult jails, they are separated, but the staff are the same, the atmosphere is the same, the concentration on controlling and keeping them secure is the same, and very little work is done with them. I must emphasise that the committed prison service do the best job they can with these youngsters, but they do not have the resources, nor do they have the time or the training.

What the children experience is a brutal place, where very serious bullying, both physical and emotional is endemic. Prison regimes are very patchy. Some may provide little or no education, with prisoners locked up for 23 hours a day. Others may provide 6 or 7 hours of education a week, but even this is insignificant. Every kind of drug is available in prison which means that there are much higher levels of self harm and suicide than you get in the outside community. Interestingly, young boys in a community

tend not to self harm or mutilate in the way that girls do, except when they are in prison.

Employers, when faced with somebody who has a criminal record, assumes they must have done something awful. Some have, of course, but you would be wrong in thinking that most of them have committed terrible crimes. Mostly they are in for burglary, theft and for fighting mainly amongst their peers. They are children who are out of control, but if they committed very serious offences are sent to a local authority secure accommodation unit, run by social workers and not by the prison service. **It is those children who have committed the lesser offences who end up in young offender institutions in prisons.**

## A Plea To Employers

I sit and talk to young people, who tell me really tragic tales of their lives, very much like we heard from Youth At Risk. Many are not making rational choices about committing crime, it is often difficult to imagine how they could have done anything else. Once in prison they get little help to leave that track and move into the mainstream of society, where they want to be and where they belong. The premise of this conference is that society having taken on the responsibility of parenting for children in care should continue that role, even after social services no longer have responsibility for them. This is an approach which is important for all children and young people who have difficulty in finding a safe place in the world.

Finally, I would appeal to employers not to exclude a young person from the possibility of employment just because they have a criminal record or have been in prison. However, if they are to grow out of their offending behaviour, as most of them do, they need help and getting a job is the first step on this route back into inclusion in mainstream society. Also, in your partnership discussions with Government, please stress that when employing these children, many of them are so damaged, not only by their by their parents, but also by the care system and then by the prison system, that on finding employment they cannot be expected **suddenly** to become good, law abiding members of society. It simply is not possible. Prison is very damaging and it does not turn young people away from crime. Even the Chief Inspector of Prisons recently recommended that all children should be removed from prison service responsibility. Around 80% of those who go to young offender institutions, re-offend within two years, and still the Government is planning to send more, even younger children to prison by extending the use of custody for 15 year olds down to 12 and possibly even to 10 year

olds. At the same time no resources are being put into promoting non custodial measures over prison. If these children are to be fit for employment and for law abiding positive lives, they must be protected and treated with respect and humanity and not punished and brutalised further by our system.



### **13. Lt. Col. R.J. Redford DL, Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Association for Greater London.**

Colonel Redford stated that he had been retired from the Army for nearly ten years and was now the Deputy Secretary of the Territorial Auxiliary and Volunteer Reserve Association for Greater London, usually known as Greater London TAVRA. He briefly explained that TAVRAs were set up in 1908, as independent Government funded bodies to manage the local peace-time administration of the Territorial Army. Initially, there were over a hundred Associations but these had gradually been whittled down to the present 14, and could be even less after the current Strategic Defence Review. He continued, that they no longer foraged horses, which had once been a major task! With a membership of 190 volunteers, and a small permanent staff, his Association now looked after some 300 properties within the M25, for all three services of the Reserve Forces and most of the Cadets. In addition, they handled their administrative funding, recruiting and liaison with local employers and the community at large.

#### **The TAVRA Organisation**

Our President is the Lord-Lieutenant of Greater London, which enables us to call on local support from his Representative Deputy Lieutenants in the London Boroughs. We have various categories of membership. First the Selected Members, who are ex-members of the Reserve Forces, bringing a great deal of expertise from their former service and present civilian careers. Ex-Officio members are the serving unit Commanders, Cadet Force members from the service cadet organisations, Representative Members including Councillors from the London Boroughs and the City Corporation, London University, the Chambers of Commerce and the TUC. Finally we have the Co-opted Members such as a state school

headteacher, a chaplain and a property expert, who don't easily fit into the other categories.

I have explained the structure to show that we are a community-based organisation, with a close interest in what happens in the community. Particularly relevant to today's conference is that our Cadets Sub-Committee and the many cadet units both in London and throughout the country, are all trying to deal with the problems affecting young people in their teens. I shall therefore concentrate on our Army Cadet activities, because our responsibilities for them go further than for the other two services. Their motto, is "To Inspire To Achieve", and they like to be known as the "Young Achievers".

#### **The Army Cadet Force**

The ACF is a national youth organisation which is neither a part of, nor run by the Army. Because the MOD funds it, they expect to get some value out of it in terms of recruiting but the majority of cadets do not in fact join the services. The age range is from 13 to 18 years and the officers and adult instructors are all volunteers who give most of their time for nothing. They come from all walks of life - there are many teachers, policemen, firemen, businessmen, local government staff and even churchmen among them and they deserve great credit for what they do.

**The main aim of the organisation is to provide a stimulating leisure activity for young people which will help to develop them into good citizens.** It would take too long to go through all they do, but their syllabus includes not only low level military training but also important general activities like first aid, the country code, map reading, Duke of Edinburgh's Award Scheme (in which the cadets have by far the largest number of participants), instruction in the role of local services and finally charitable work in support of the local community. My Association awards an annual prize to the detachment which has completed the best community project.

#### **Youth And Community**

Another way in which the ACF is putting something back into society is through the Youth and Community Initiative. This scheme, agreed initially between government departments, involves groups of deprived and vulnerable youngsters who spend a day, a weekend or sometimes a week with the Army Cadets, taking part in a programme of adventurous and challenging activities away from their normal urban environment. The groups are arranged through contacts with the police, the borough councils and the social services and the only yardstick in selecting them is that they should be of the same age group as the cadets and regarded as crime-vulnerable, which in London could mean almost anyone, but clearly we are aiming at the under-privileged. We have drawn the line at young criminals because of

## 15. Gordon D'Silva, Training for Life

In opening his talk, Gordon D'Silva said that he did not think anyone could leave the conference unconvinced that something had to be done for care leavers. We sometimes felt elated because we had our small successes, but then felt quite frustrated for not being able to do enough, mainly through the lack of partnerships, the lack of people coming together to work on what were very clear problems to us all. He continued that it would have been wonderful if we could have bottled this energy and used it to convince the Government and other key partners that a strategic approach to dealing with young people leaving care had to be adopted.

### The Moral Issue

Training for Life, is a very small charity based in central London, and we perhaps approach these issues from a slightly different angle. When talking about care leavers and the issues of work, employment and employers, their problem is often not in finding work, but in sustaining it. On the one hand, the young people who have gone through the residential care and support process, have been told that what

they have to achieve and what is right for them. However, for whatever reasons, they do not get there. During their life they have learned many bad habits and those habits continue when they leave care, usually at 16 years old. Now, how on earth can we expect young children, our own sons and daughters, to leave home and be on their own at 16? Can we honestly expect them to survive, no! Should we, no! It is morally reprehensible, yet as a society we permit this and we continue to promote this. This is a moral issue and the title of today's conference is the correct one.

### Training For Life

Our approach was not to spend too much time in looking for the softer options. We simply asked how do we help to empower the individual to get into work? Because we are a charity and a training organisation, we faced the fact that we could not tackle the real, fundamental social issues but one thing we could do was to concentrate on the idea of healthy lifestyles. If, somehow, we could quickly get our young men and women to feel, to see and to measure the difference **their** actions can make to **their own** lives, then we could build on that in terms of getting them to acquire appropriate life skills, such as presentation, attitude, good time keeping and all the other aspects that are so important. This route led us to something we all know about, exercise and fitness. If you are down, or depressed, then going for a jog, or a workout in the gym, can motivate you into getting out of that depression, or rut. Those who keep their New Year's resolutions are often very proud of themselves, and maybe if they can maintain their commitment, this changes their lives. We try to apply this same simple logic to our young people, by actually integrating healthy lifestyles education within our training programmes. We have made this the bedrock of what we do. So when the youngsters leave our training programmes and go to work, they can link their lifestyles with work so they may start to question the routine of getting "bombed out" on Saturday and Sunday night, because the chances of their getting into work on the Monday would be slight. We also

teach our clients that diet, nutrition, and drug or alcohol misuse and abuse, has a direct relationship to work. It also has a fundamental role to play in making training for work amore rewarding experience.

### **Employment Opportunities**

When we first approach many employers, their reaction has always been, “ .... yes we’ve heard this before, yet another training organisation who think they are the best thing since sliced bread”. Our approach therefore is to say: give us a chance to turn this logic upside down. We don’t want to train first and then come to you for jobs. Instead, let us look at it from a business perspective. If we could genuinely meet some of your needs as an employer and we can customise and train these individuals into sustainable employment, then we believe that for you, as an employer, this could be value for money. I accept that industry and commerce is essentially profit led, but if we prove that our approach works, you may find that that you have actually saved on employment and recruitment costs and are prepared to invest further. I have got employers saying this, which is rather nice.

### **The Way Forward**

This comes to the key point about how we proceed. Should there be a Government led National Strategy? The new Government are clearly keen to be enablers. They are demonstrating a commitment to encourage an atmosphere of partnership and social entrepreneurship. New Deal will be an important vehicle to get many of our young into work. My fear, however, is that many , many poorly equipped young men and women, with unhelpful and unhealthy lifestyles would simply not be able to **sustain** employment, let alone find work.

The Government needs to consider, and perhaps acknowledges that this is a special problem, one which perhaps cannot be fully addressed by New Deal alone. It would be fantastic if we were enabled to develop true partnerships, with the resources to develop many

of the ideas mentioned here today. I was delighted to hear from Brendon Barbour about the TUC possibly adopting a mentoring approach to youngsters in care. If we could get every employer to do the same thing, and to second one individual with responsibility for organising a team of volunteers within their company, this would be tremendous. For example, they could agree by committing only 4 hours of their time to looking after, mentoring, or parenting, one newly employed person. The benefits to the employer, aside from reducing staff turnover, would also help favourably to address employment and recruitment costs. Let us draw from the many schemes that are actually working and see if they can be brought together into some sort of a national strategy.

At the end of the day, as much as I would like employers to genuinely empathise with the client group that I am working with and feel passionate about, the chances are that they may express interest but may leave it to others to develop. We have to get employers on board, but to get them to stay on board we have to ensure that our young men and women have jobs which they can sustain. We address their healthy lifestyles, which feeds into their work lifestyles, which feeds into their hope and aspirations of making their dreams reality. Much has been said today, which has held my attention throughout. It has also been a lovely experience, with everyone having so much to contribute. The people in this audience can make things happen, and by coming together we can make a difference!