

Summary of the All-Party Parliamentary Group for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Wednesday 24th October 2018
6.00pm – 7.30pm
Boothroyd Room, Portcullis House, Westminster

Chair: Steve McCabe MP, Chair of the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers

Speaker: Helen Grimes, Department for Education

Panel: Jenny Molloy, Ashley John-Baptiste, Christel Dee, Luke Elkins

Topic: From Care to Careers

Welcome

The Chair welcomed speakers and attendees.

DfE Initiatives: Social Impact Bonds and Civil Service care leaver internships

Helen Grimes spoke about a new £5 million funding pot from the Treasury to go to local authorities who are supporting care leavers not in education, employment or training. Services received payments based on outcomes in their projects. There are trials happening in London, Sheffield and Bristol, and the four year project hopes to help decision makers understand the key issues. This scheme has worked previously in homelessness and substance misuse.

The civil service is recruiting care leavers for year-long paid internship opportunities in 2019. Other recent announcements include the apprenticeship bursary for care leavers and the Care Leaver Covenant.

Any comments or queries can be passed onto Helen via the secretariat (appg@becomecharity.org.uk).

Panel Discussion

The panel is made up of four care leavers who now work in a variety of different fields.

- Christel Dee, presenter, writer and digital creative
- Luke Elkins, film & TV production assistant and actor
- Ashley John-Baptiste, BBC Journalist
- Jenny Molloy, author, adviser and trainer

Luke was taken into care at 3 months and had a number of different placements. He now works in film & TV, both in front of and behind the camera. His most recent job was in the art department for Star Wars. He also sits on Become's Ideas & Influence Council.

Christel is a presenter, digital creative and author. She went into care aged 8. She won a care leaver scholarship to Westminster University to study film and TV production, then started working as a runner. She starting working for a production company doing animation, and she is also a YouTuber. The BBC discovered her comedy sketches and she started presenting for Doctor Who. Now she is digital marketing manager for Doctor Who and has just published a book about the series, *The Women Who Lived, Amazing Tales for Future Time Lords*.

Jenny was pregnant when she left care, which had its pros and cons, and she had no qualifications due to the number of placement moves she had. She is now at university doing the same degree as her 25-year-old daughter.

Ashley went into care aged 2 and had 5 different placements. He was disengaged at school at an early age but ended up going to Cambridge to study history. Auditioned for the X Factor as a dare during his finals. He eventually decided to quit because he wanted to do something more fulfilling. He presented BBC 3 documentary about care and then was offered traineeship as a journalist and is now a BBC news reporter.

Did you get any support or advice when you were leaving care?

Ashley was surprised to get good GCSEs. The Sutton Trust offered him a scholarship and opportunity to apply to Cambridge. He had encouragement from teachers and was exposed to academia. He saw a bigger world of education and the potential options for what he could do. Privileged children get this kind of exposure from a young age, but it's much more difficult for disadvantaged kids.

Luke didn't get much support in his chosen career, but he mentioned it while doing a first aid course, and the woman who ran the course also worked for a production company and offered him some work experience. He would never otherwise have crossed paths with her. It's important to say what you want to do loudly, because you never know who's going to be able to give you an opportunity.

Jenny wanted to leave everything behind when she left care at 16. She felt stigmatized and didn't want anyone to know. There were social workers and teachers who believed in her consistently throughout the years and stuck with her. She didn't get support from her leaving care service but knew she would be all right. She is still in touch with one of her old teachers now. It's important to reach out wherever you can to find opportunities and believe in yourself.

Christel had supportive foster carers but they didn't know how to support with uni applications. She was in touch with her aunt who was able to provide some support and had help from leaving care team with council flat and university.

Question - someone wants to become a long haul driver. Looking for opportunities, but struggling to find the chance to step into what he really wants to do. Wants the local authority to cover the £2500 license application cost.

Jenny: you have to put yourself out there every way you can. Can take a long time. Took Jenny 5 years to publish her first book, then other two took 6 months. Didn't know how it was going to happen, but knew it would.

Christel pleaded with LA for driving lessons, eventually got them to reimburse her. She had to push a lot to get it but it eventually worked. Charities like Sutton Trust, Buttle UK and Capstone Trust might offer funding for these kinds of things.

Question - Wandsworth have two care leaver apprentices and want more. Recently met up with different employers about expanding corporate parent duties, looking at other organisations. One YP was interested in plumbing. Exposure is really important, what we can do to push that forward with more business, more LAs?

Steve McCabe, Chair: lots of children in care who are bright but aren't given opportunities. How can we increase this exposure? Children in care should have special entitlement to placements and experiences.

Ashley: people can only aspire to what they see. If you're in care, with trauma, lack of opportunity, how can you aspire to something significant? It's hard to find out what jobs are really out there. When he had a pathway plan at 16 it felt like a tick box exercise and not as important about having to move out at 18. Local authorities don't set the bar high, and young people in care aren't exposed to the same opportunities. Apprenticeships are a good start but it needs to start from a young age at a local level.

Christel sought out TV work experience, applying alongside a lot of other people. Don't be afraid to mention care and how it makes you independent. There are scholarships and bursaries out there. Make yourself visible, making contacts. It took six years working in retail to get paid TV work, but she did unpaid work and developing own content and making contacts.

People should talk about care as part of their selling points. You shouldn't be ashamed of being in care, you should be proud of having gone through care and those tough experiences. It has put Christel in really good stead compared to some of her peers who are less ambitious and more reliant on parents. Care doesn't define you, it's an experience that you have and should be able to talk about it.

No one knew that Jenny was in care, including her husband and children, until she wrote a book. Sometimes there is judgement from others, but growing up in care does give you skills, like resilience to cope with change.

It's important to be confident. Being on a children in care council helped Luke to build his confidence and find his voice.

Ashley had a hard time when leaving in care. He was studying for A-Levels and preparing for Cambridge while also getting ready to live independently. Cambridge didn't offer accommodation outside of term time and his PA wouldn't help – suggested either living in hostels between terms or going to a London university instead. Ashley eventually got his local MP involved to help resolve this. Now, Ashley is used as a poster boy for his local authority even though they weren't much help for him at the time.

Leaving care teams need to focus on passion, ambition and support, looking to go above and beyond for the children in their care.

How do you get out of a rut? What kept you going through difficult times?

It's important to surround yourself with the right people and try to stay positive.

Christel once got fired the week before Christmas. She had no money saved up and Christmas/New Year is a bad time to get jobs and she didn't have parents to ask for money. She applied for income support but felt like she'd failed. She knew that this career was what she wanted to do and had to keep trying. She had to take on some temporary jobs to get the right experience, which is risky but helped her get where she wanted to be.

Ashley reiterates this. When he got into uni, he had changed a lot as he suddenly had to work a lot harder and needed to find friends who would support that journey.

He says that you need to find people who are going to encourage you. People who aren't as motivated can rub off on you. Take what you have and run with it. Ask for meetings with people and make yourself harder to ignore.

You have to start with a bit of self-belief. You're worth it. Make your life the way that you want to be.

Who was there to talk to?

Luke was very lucky with foster carers who feel like his family.

Christel used to keep everything bottled up, but once she started processing her experiences, she could talk to foster carers and aunts who've been very supportive.

Ashley has found good community. There are good people wherever you go, friends, role models.

Growing up, Jenny loved people like the school nurse, secretary and cooks.

Suggestions and comments from audience:

- We need a conduit between the care leaver and employer, someone to support them writing a CV, helping them get into work. Staff at the Rees Foundation want to try and set up a system that connects employers and care leavers.
- Social care professionals can start off passionate but then get worn down by the workload. Need someone who can be a mentor. Mentors have made a huge difference personally. Should be available to everyone who wants one. Could Become and other charities match up mentors and young people?
- Heard from an employment officer for LA. Works with clients and young people to match people up. Biggest barrier she comes across is housing. Not automatically given a council house because there isn't enough social housing available.
- Someone had a support worker who helped her moved into a private tenancy and work. Had child protection apprenticeships, got employee of the year, now working full time as a support worker, but finding difficult to move up and get more qualifications or push forward.

Closing remarks

The Chair thanked everyone for coming.

Next meeting: February 13th