

**Meeting of the Cross Party Group for
Looked After Children**

WEDNESDAY 11TH DECEMBER 2013
12.30-1.30

AM's Present:

David Melding AM– Chairperson

In attendance:

Rhian Williams, PA/Administrative Secretary, Voices From Care - Minutes

By Invitation

Delma Hughes, Founder Director, Siblings Together

Apologies received from:

Bethan Jenkins AM,
Mark Isherwood AM
Simon Thomas AM
Joyce Watson AM
Dr Heather Ottaway, Lecturer in Social Work, Cardiff University
Deborah Jones, Chief Executive Officer, Voices From Care

WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR

DM opened the meeting and extended a warm welcome to Delma Hughes and gave a brief purpose of the Cross Party Group on Looked After Children, adding that any information and outcomes from the meeting would be circulated to the Assembly Members who were unable to attend.

MINUTES

Minutes of the meeting held on 6th November 2013 were accepted as a true record.

MATTERS ARISING

DM reported that further to the last CPG on LAC meeting; when it was agreed that DM would draft a motion for a back bench debate around children missing, the group had been successful in their application in being selected by the Business Committee for a debate on 4th December.

THE ELECTION OF A CHAIR AND SECRETARY

DM proposed the election of a chair and secretary would be deferred until the next Cross Party Group meeting.

PRESENTATION ON SIBLINGS IN CARE

DM stated the issues around siblings in care was an important issue and not one that was spoken about often.

DH introduced herself and gave a brief outline of Siblings Together; a project that promotes positive contact between siblings separated by care and adoption. DH stated that sibling separation is a predominately a neglected area of social work which is recognised by Children's Rights and social workers. DH stated the implementation on contact is not being implemented and a child cannot enforce their legal rights under the UNCRC to see their family and siblings and have a right to be believed.

To support separated siblings, Siblings Together run residential camps throughout the summer and autumn for siblings from all over the UK and also hold twice monthly actively days in north London. Siblings Together's Creative Connections programme ; which is aimed at both siblings and care leavers aged over 16, hold creative events such as weeklong drama programmes, creative writing and poetry residencies. DH informed that Siblings Together were pleased to announce the arrival of a new project where trained volunteers would take brothers and sisters for the day to spend valuable time together in a more personal environment.

DH informed that there were approximately 70 thousand looked after children in Britain and felt that the figure will keep on increasing. With 84% of siblings ending up being separated and some children not wishing to return home to their families and due to numerous placements and a high turnover of social workers, sibling contact could be as low as once a year.

DH felt strongly that not enough assessment was carried out initially on children when entering the care system, emphasising assessments are carried out far too early in Britain and referred to the good practice carried out in the USA where assessments were carried out over a 18/24 month period and, in many states, it is the law that siblings have to remain together with carers being located to accommodate families of 2, 3, 4 or more, adding that if it is impossible to keep siblings together, they attend the same school and remain in the

same area thus ensuring regular contact to retain their bond. DH continued by stating that a great deal of research has been carried out on siblings in care for example – Professor Robert Saunders, Swansea University; who has written a book on care leavers and Dr Heather Ottaway, Lecturer in Social Work, Cardiff University

DH stated she felt that it was like a punishment to separate siblings which can have a long term impact on bonding and felt it is perfectly normal for siblings to squabble etc and make up after.

ACTION: DH TO FORWARD DM DATA TO SUBSTANTIATE THE LAWS IN THE USA

DH informed Siblings Together are currently running three projects; with the project in Cardiff receiving no funding at present, DH enquired if DM could identify any good sponsors who could assist with the project. DH continued by stating that she would like more contact with Wales and felt that the local authorities could be undertaking activities such as summer camps for siblings which offer them continuity with each other ; Conway is one authority that is currently obliging, and DH would like more Welsh children to attend these camps.

ACTION: DM TO WRITE TO THE MINISTER REQUESTING A PROVISION FOR A CO PLACEMENT FOR SIBLINGS TO REMAIN TOGETHER AND CIRCULATE RESPONSE TO GROUP MEMBERS

ACTION: DH TO FORMERLY INVITE DM TO THE SUMMER CAMP IN PEMBROKESHIRE IN 2014

DM enquired if there was any emerging good practice in England that Wales could emulate. DH stated that there was the Social Care Bill. DM stated that he was hoping for an amendment in the Social Care Bill Wales which would raise the age of leaving care up to 21. A short discussion took place around Scotland being very ahead of England and Wales in terms of good practice.

ACTION: DH TO INFORM DM WHEN LEGISLATION CHANGES IN ENGLAND

DM thanked DH for a very poignant discussion.

DATE OF NEXT MEETING

Date of next meeting to be advised.

ACTION: RW TO LIAISE WITH SARAH SHARPE

There being no further business the meeting closed at 1.15 p.m.