

the VOICE

... OF YOUTH IN CARE

Issue. 4 of the Youth In Care Newsletter Project

May 2004



Photo digitally modified by Lucas Krefl

HI! WELCOME TO OUR NEWSLETTER—the fourth one created by Halifax youth in care. It's different because we talk about care (the child welfare system), and how it really is—not how people see it.

All of the articles and drawings here were written or drawn by us between the fall of 2003 and the spring of 2004. It's all about what it's like to be in care—the good and the bad.

We're all youth in care (or former youth in care) living in foster homes, group homes, or, in some cases, living with a parent or relative.

Next time you have a couple of minutes at a computer, check out: www.youthnewsletter.net which is our website. There's all kinds of cool stuff there! We put all of our articles and drawings onto the web pages.

We'd like to thank Children's Aid Society of Halifax for running this program, and we'd like to thank our financial sponsors: Department of Community Services (through the Canada-Nova Scotia Skills and Learning Framework), Youth Employability Project, Children's Aid Society of Halifax Foundation, and the Halifax Youth Foundation. You made it possible!

The Project

Trevor Dakins

Four consecutive releases, five versions of a similar story including the Amherst Newsletter. For just under four years, groups of several youth have been presenting blatant manifestos of their respective thoughts on care. The program was started in 2000 by **Gretchen Skye**, **Barrie MacFarlane**, and **Andrew Safer**, the group's facilitator, who has led the Newsletter from ANGRY BROODING to a productive analysis of the system its writers depend on. The project has grown beyond its home in Halifax, as in the previous double issue, to Amherst and to a global level on the world wide web. Funded greatly by the **Department of Community Services** and the **Youth Employability Project**, the program gives youth in care a job, but more importantly, a voice.

Stereotyping

Four little words...

Elyse Saulnier

When people think of foster (or group home) kids they usually think of trouble/bad youths. They have it etched in their minds that anyone who is in foster care is a bad kid who was out beating people up, smoking, drinking, skipping school, shoplifting, and all in all, they think that they are "little hell raisers". It is not fair that people depict foster kids like that.

Don't get me wrong. Some kids who are in foster care are some of the things that I mentioned, but some are not. Some are in foster care because they don't get along with their parents, their parents died or their mother or father or both are a little crazy. There are some troubled/bad youths in foster care, and some do change their ways and clean up their act, but others don't and it will only get worse for them because if they keep acting that way, when they turn 16 they will be out on their butt with nowhere to go.

... cont'd on pg.2

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Interviewers and interviewees: Front left to right: Jamie Johnson, (legs dangling to the side) Manda Jarvis, Elyse Saulnier, Ashley Wanamaker, Alex MacIntosh, Jessica Schwartz; middle row left to right: Laura Johnson, Tina Doucette; back row left to right: Trevor Dakins, Shawna Comeau, Andrew Nickerson, AJ Smiley

Who's a bad kid?

Christie Reid

I met with a 15 year old child in care about the stereotypes that he has encountered while in care. His name has been changed for confidentiality. First I should give a little background on Jonathon Miller. He has been in the system for only about a year now. Which is why I chose him. A fresh look at the system always seems less biased. He's lived with one family since the move and has gone to plenty of schools. So within these schools he has definitely come close to those who don't understand our world.

Christie: What have you encountered along the lines of stereotyping, since you've been in care?

Jonathon: I have encountered a lot. People always think that since you are in care you are a bad kid.

Christie: What do you think is meant by a bad kid?

Jonathon: Kids who do drugs and steal, and get bad grades...just stuff.

Christie: How does this make you feel?

Jonathon: Annoyed cause they always hold a different perception of who I really am.

Christie: Do you see a way that this could change?

Jonathon: Not really.

Christie: Why?

Jonathon: People are narrow-minded and they just want to believe what they want to believe.

Christie: For you, foster care is...

Jonathon: It's a place where you can get away from the place where you don't want to be...a sanctuary.

Christie: Do you have any ideas on how to change the way people see us?

Jonathon: No, not me, but other people might.

Christie: Do your foster parents ever make assumptions about what kind of person you are?

Jonathon: No, not really. She likes to know me for me.

Christie: Do you ever see her making assumptions about your parents?

Jonathon: Not really. Sometimes, I guess, but I tell her that is not how it is.

From this interview, I learned that there are all types of stereotypes about care, and none of them are acceptable. There are many cases where even the foster parent makes assumptions about the parents of their ward. This frustrates and angers the child to the point that they don't want to talk about things they know about, or about what's right and what's wrong. We have all come across this, and it's up to us to change it for the better.

Jessica: "You go to someone's house and they watch you like a hawk once they find out you live in a group home. It sucks."

OK. So now you're probably wondering who Jessica is! She is one of six youth in care we interviewed for this Newsletter (besides Jonathon). What they had to say will appear after some of the articles that follow...

Why do you do it!

Tina Doucette

I find that most everyone—kids my age and adults—stereotype. I don't think little kids do, probably because they don't care. The reason they do it is probably because they don't understand that not everyone is in care because of themselves. Maybe it was their parents' fault. You should never bully anyone about anything.

How would you feel if someone made fun of you or didn't want to be around you because of the way you dress or your hair? I know how that feels. You get so mad you want to punch them or worse, cry.

Why should they stop? Because they don't know the whole story. They don't have the right to make fun because we live differently or because our rules don't come from our mother or father.

It's just wrong!

"When you interview, you get to listen. Feel what they are feeling."

—Brandon Farmer

Four little words... cont'd from pg. 1

Some people think that when you get put in foster care you are there until you are 18 but that is not true because some kids are in permanent care and some are in temporary care. After a few months they could be back with their parents unless they put up a fight, and even then they could get put back with their parents. It is not fair that when a person learns that you are in foster care they automatically ask these 4 little words: "What did you do?" And if you say that you didn't get along with your parents they think that you started all of the arguments and that none of it was your parents' fault. These are just some of the reasons that people stereotype foster kids and, unfortunately, it won't change.



Illustration by
Trevor Dakins

What Children's Aid Society is All About

Keeping the doors open

Lucas Kreft

There are some people who think CAS is stupid, but I don't! The older people get, the more they realize that CAS is a positive thing. After you're 16, CAS can close all of their doors to you. I'm getting to that point where those doors are closing, so I have to make positive choices to keep those doors open, or it's off to the streets I go. Before it's too late I should thank them for helping make my life better, not worse. I will do that by making positive choices and keeping the doors open.

Foster homes & choices

Charles McLaughlin

Foster homes give you a variety of choices and support. For example, for support, I went to school and came home, and my foster mother helped me with my homework. The choices are like going out and fun stuff like going shopping, chillin' with friends, and stuff like that.

History of Children's Aid Society of Halifax

Manda Jarvis

A woman by the name of Mrs. Miriam Jacobsen compiled all the information about the history of CAS. These are just some facts about the history and how it all came together.

In 1914 the act passed giving the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals the power of a Children's Aid Society. At first, a lot of foster homes were free, and there were no actual social workers. Around 1926, social workers were hired. In the beginning, each social worker had about 158 on their caseload, compared to about 20 or more they have these days.

The reason foster homes were free at first was because of a shortage of money. So it seems there will never be enough money for foster kids. CAS has improved a lot, but could definitely improve more. In what way? Money.

CAS is a good thing

Elyse Saulnier

Some ways to help you and your parents are they can move the child into foster care or with a relative. They will get the child counselling and when the child is ready, the counsellor will talk to the child and parents together. I think Children's Aid is a good thing for kids because if they were not around and a kid was in a troubled home and they ran away, they would only get brought back if they were under 16, and they would have to stay where they can't get along with their parents or stay in a place where they feel scared. In my opinion, that's not a good thing.

Not like home

Shawna Comeau

Being in care sucks because it isn't the same as living in your house with your family. Also, when you are in care, you have a whole bunch of staff telling you what to do. There are different kids coming and going. Sometimes you don't

Not like home *cont'd from pg. 3*
even get a chance to get to know them. Most of the time, there isn't even a room for kids who need it the most.

There are so many children who need care or help but there are not enough group homes or foster homes to go around, and to help all those people who need it. Really, I think they need to open up more group homes and foster homes. Personally, I think that when you live in care you sometimes think that you're given the world. Really, it isn't true because you only think about the good things and not the bad things that happen to you in care. So basically, that is my opinion about care.

Foster parents' secrets

Christie Reid

We all know what it is to take in a child who is not your own. These people who do so are generally nice. As far as I've encountered, I have come across nice and low-complication people. But there are those who are different.

There are cases where children who are taken into care and put into a house they have never been to, are not so lucky.

The scare of being in a place that we don't know is hard enough, but to have a foster parent who doesn't want you for anything more than the money or labour is worse.

In the past, that was the biggest reason for having a child who is not yours—to have them for labours around the house and farm. The rules have since changed but here are some of the ways that children have been treated in the past...

From a confidential source, these are some stories about disciplinary actions. Having to cut a whole yard of grass with a pair of scissors. Painting a church white during the summer with a toothbrush. There are other disciplinary actions like this that I was told not to name in this article. Having been in a hard disciplinary environment most of his life, my source was forced to run away at the age of 12 to get away from the overbearing rules that were laid upon this young child. Disciplinary actions are usually practiced with youth and children, but ones this extreme are inevitably wrong.

There are other known cases of the foster parent beating the child or youth if they did not listen to what they were told, even in cases where the child or youth

may have had a disability preventing comprehension of the orders and actions.

I must say, though, I have not come across these actions myself. I have heard stories.

Not only is there physical abuse; there is intellectual abuse. When a child is taken into care, especially a young child, they have intellectual needs. They need a person to believe in what they want to do and to be there for them through all the times they will inevitably need them. Discouraging a youth from their dream of a career when they are older is not a way of supporting a person and their dreams.

Youth may be able to take care of themselves for the most part, but they still need an adult most of the time. But when a guardian doesn't seem to take an everyday interest in their life, the youth becomes afraid to come to them when an actual event comes up... like when advice is needed.

But I cannot speak for all of the foster parents out there. As for the rest, we must thank you for your generosity to the community, to help a child and/or youth in need.

Scared about foster care

Ashley Wanamaker

I think when kids are first told by their social worker or their parents that they have to go into foster care for the first time, they are scared because they don't know what it's like, what will happen. They think: how will they treat me? Will they feed me or not? Some foster homes are different from others. Some may not feed you as much as you need, or the peers you live with may steal from you or tease you. The foster home I was in, I was scared at first, but the people I lived with actually made me feel really comfortable. Sometimes it's also not the same—you're not at home with your family—but all in all, foster homes aren't that bad.

Switching workers

Tina Doucette

Switching workers puts a lot of stress on us trying to get to know them, and them getting to know what we're like, because they already know what's been going on in our life. Now that I've gotten used to my new worker, hopefully she will be my last and only one.

My Social Worker...

... helps me understand

Jamie Johnson

Social workers help you with a lot of things like giving you money and giving you a place to live when you need it. Social workers also help you understand what's going on. Some people at first hate social workers but when you really, really think about it, they help you with a lot of stuff. They also talk for you in court like saying that you don't want to see your parents, or that you do, or any other reason. I like social workers, especially my social worker, Monica, because she helps me understand things, like why I got grounded, or if I didn't understand something that happened.

... gave me second chances

Manda Jarvis

My old social worker Jessie Smith (CAS Port Hawkesbury) was always there for me, but she's gone now. It was hard for me to switch workers because I felt like I could trust Jessie, and it takes a lot for me to really trust people. I miss Jessie's phone calls, and e-mails, just to see how I am. At first I hated Jessie and the rest of CAS when I was first put into care, I thought they were just trying to ruin my life, but then after awhile I realized that all Jessie did was give me a second chance to live a life and be myself. Jessie's one person who's given me A LOT of second chances. And not many people have given me that many chances.

Alex spoke about his social worker:
"She has a lot of cases. She has like 50 cases and for a while there I thought she was just ignoring me but any time I actually got hold of her, she's been a really good worker."

... forgets I'm here

MJ Timmons

My social worker makes me really pissed off sometimes. She takes forever to get back to me about stuff, I never see her at all, and she never (cont'd on pg. 5)

(cont'd from pg.4) listens to me. I can understand why I don't see her like every 1-2 weeks, but I see her like once every 3-4 months. She's nice and all that, but she's not a good social worker. She never calls me, to ask about how things are going, she calls my foster mom. And she always takes my foster mom's side, no matter what. I think if a social worker is going to have someone in Halifax when they live somewhere else, they should at least call them once a week or something to see how things are going. Not just forget they're there.

... doesn't call back

Tiffany Sharpe

My social worker doesn't call me. I think she doesn't care for me because I am doing so well now. I think she is only caring for the kids who aren't doing so well now which isn't fair. You call her and can't get through so you leave a message and she doesn't call you back. She is supposed to be there for me all the time because she is my guardian, but she does not take any responsibility for me at all.

I am always having some sort of problem so I try to call her but can't get through for her to help me. This really, really hurts because she isn't there for me. Sometimes I wish I had a different social worker but they just won't let me. I asked once but they told me that I can't pick and choose.

Jessica: "My social worker always talked behind my back, so I got a new one."



Illustration by Jamie Johnson

Supervised visits

Manda Jarvis

I go on supervised visits with my mom and brothers a lot, but not as much as when I first moved into my foster home, because they cut back on me seeing my mom. I like supervised visits in a way, but in other ways I don't. At supervised visits you have to watch what you say and do, even though it's supposed to be "your time with family".

Some access facilitators are really nice, and others aren't as nice. Some will interrupt what you say almost every time you open your mouth, some will just sit back in the corner and let you and your family talk and decide what to do. I think if you're going on a supervised visit, everything should be either a big surprise (meaning what you do), or you should have options. But it can suck if they choose what you do, because they might think something really boring is all super cool. Or the access facilitator should sit you and your family down and say these are the options of what you can do. And let you choose, rather than them choosing.

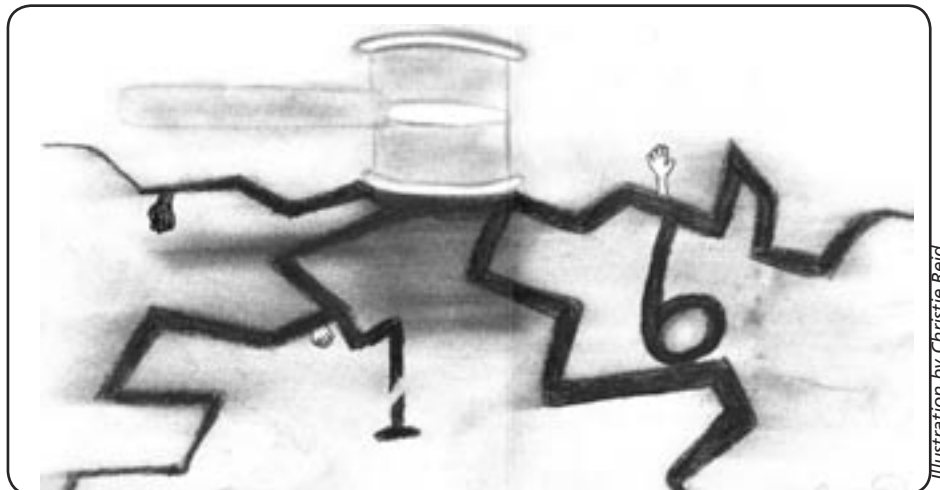
No one to tuck you in at night

Manda Jarvis

I may not know how it feels to go to sleep on an empty stomach, nor do I know how it feels to only have the clothes on my back, and no bed to sleep in at night.

But I do know how it feels to have no one close to tuck me in at night when I feel scared, or to have someone rub my head when I feel ill, or bail me out of trouble, no matter what kind.

But I do know one thing: you always have yourself.



When you're in care, after you turn 16, if you move back home, under certain circumstances you can lose CAS and DCS services.

Illustration by Ashley Wanamaker

Seeing and hearing too much



MJ Timmons

Teens in care see too much, hear too much, and know things they shouldn't. What I mean by that statement is a lot of kids in care had a hard past, and some, not all, were abused. Some had parents who drink a lot, and probably saw fighting, and heard things that shouldn't have been said at all. For example: you were a mistake, you shouldn't be here, etc., etc. Some teens also know too much, like stuff about their parents' relationship, which shouldn't concern the kids at all. That's adult stuff, not kids stuff.

"Big Eyes & Ears" by Ashley Wanamaker

Illustration by Christie Reid

First impressions of care

Laura Johnson

When I first came into care, I didn't know what to think. I did know that I was very confused. I was told one thing, then it was switched to another. For example, the first social worker I had told me that I would never be able to do anything or go anywhere. Then my next social worker told me that I will be able to go places and do things. So that really confused me.

I never knew what was going to happen next, until it was happening. I was put in one home for about 2 weeks, then I was put in my current home. The whole time I never really knew where I was going or where I was going next, until I was there.

The first couple of weeks of care were very confusing. I didn't know all the rules or if I was going to be moved again. I did know one thing, though. I knew that my life would never be the same and I could never go back to the way things used to be. I got over that, moved on, met new people, learned new things, and it's not so bad.

Jamie Johnson

My first impression of foster care was that I thought that it would be hard to make more friends and basically start over. And when you get to your new home, if there are other girls there you don't know what to think about them or her. You don't know if she steals or what she does. I mean, it wasn't that hard for me but for some people, it is really hard on them. And I mean some people think that we have it bad, but just think there is someone in the world who has it about 10 times harder than you.

What was your first impression of a group home?

Jessica: "A lot better than people said it would be. I heard that there were like beds beside each other and you'd wake up and there would be somebody with a knife to your throat. (It was nothing like that!)"

Alex: "I thought people in suits were gonna come get me at first, like the FBI, but it didn't happen."

Where We Live

Homes

Brandon Farmer

Homes are good to have because you stay dry, clean, and you don't freeze to death. It's better if you have a house than living on the streets.

There should be more homes so people don't have to steal and fight for the things they need. If there weren't enough homes, it would make people feel not loved and not wanted.

There are not enough homes because there are millions of people that need help. There are only about three hundred homes but there are a lot of foster homes but they are for kids of the age of 1 to 2, and age 13 and up.

Switching homes

Manda Jarvis

Switching homes is hard, because you have a lot to get used to. Like new rules, people, the area, bus routes, and lots of other new things. Sometimes it's for the best, but not always. You could've been moved for various reasons.

I've only actually lived in one foster home, so I don't know how it feels to be juggled around like some youth are. But when I moved, it was hard. Here I am, with two social workers I barely even know, moving into a house I've never been in, and I'm supposed to call this place my home? I don't like going to get a drink of juice at my friends' houses because I'm too shy, and I know them. I don't know these people, and I'm supposed to be able to go to the fridge and get a drink of juice? And call this place my home? It took a while but I did it. Now when I see a new girl come in, I try to be nice to her, because I know how it is. Especially if it's her first time in care.

Bus routes

Laura Johnson

When you first go into a new foster home in an area where you've never been before, one of the worst things to learn is bus routes. You have to learn where to get on and where to get off, and that can be confusing if you don't know the area.

When my little sister and I moved, we didn't know where anything was or where any bus stops even were. One of the girls living where we moved, showed us where to get on the bus and explained where to get off. We didn't even know the area so we had to completely guess when to get off. Of course, we were wrong, so we had to walk half an hour to 45 minutes home. Luckily, I knew that to get home you had to walk straight and then turn on our street.

It wouldn't have been so bad if there were nice, heated bus stops, or even brick ones. We could have waited for the next bus instead of walking on that cold, cold day!



Illustration by Trevor Dakins

Changing Schools

Laura Johnson

When you move into a new home, in a new place, chances are you're going to have to change schools. This is good and bad in different ways.

It is good to change schools because you meet new people, you may try new things, sports, etc. You also meet new teachers who may teach you better than the ones you had at your old school.

Some bad things about changing schools are that you have to make new friends, and you miss your old friends. You have to learn who all the teachers are and what they expect of you. You need to learn your way around the school, and to your classes.

Overall, I think changing schools is hard, and it does suck, but I gotta live with it!!

Shawna Comeau

When you're in care you have to change schools if the place where you are living is out of the district of the school. Overall it sucks changing schools because you leave behind everything, such as friends and maybe even a boyfriend, teachers and staff and all of the memories that you had there too.

After changing schools, having to go and start at your new school that you are changing to is very hard and scary to do cause people are shy and scared of meeting new people and having to

make new friends all over again. Also, having to adjust to a new school. Other than that, it is not so bad changing schools. I think that it's no fair that just because you are in care, that because of where you are living, you have to change because maybe you don't want to change from the school that you are going to, to another school. Also, I don't think it is fair how they make you change schools against your own will. The reason I know all of this is because I've had experience with this kind of stuff, because it happened to me once.

Manda Jarvis

I think it should be your choice what school you go to when you go into care, unless you moved really far. But if you moved from one part of Halifax to another, you should be able to continue going to the same school. CAS should pay for your bus pass, even if you live right down the street from another school, because not everyone wants to just leave their school, their friends, and go to this brand new school, where they don't know the halls, teachers, or other kids.

CAS should let the teens call the shots with school. They don't let us say much else about ourselves, and it's only school, As long as we go, that's all that should matter. CAS tells us to go to school, get our grade 12, and go to university. Are they going to tell us what university to go to? NO! So why should they tell us what high school to go to?

Tina Doucette

You should try and keep us close to where we go to school because I'm pretty sure you don't like going to a new school. Well, times that by two because it's embarrassing trying to tell people where you live and why.

Switching schools

Tina Doucette

School gets worse if your home life is going downhill. That just started happening to me. I used to be fine but for some reason lately (the past 2 to 3 years) school and my home life get mixed up.

School used to be fun for me. I used to get good grades and everything. I think the reason I don't do so well is because I've moved from houses to group homes and switched schools in such a short period of time that I miss work and get confused, so I think to myself, well, I guess I'm not going to be here that long so I might as well have fun! Then I get a reputation and it's hard to get rid of it.

I'm trying to get better and be who I used to be because I want to stay at my group home, and want to pass my high school and get a good job and be what I want to be. School has never quit on me, so why should I quit on school?

**Changing schools
means
leaving your
friends behind.**

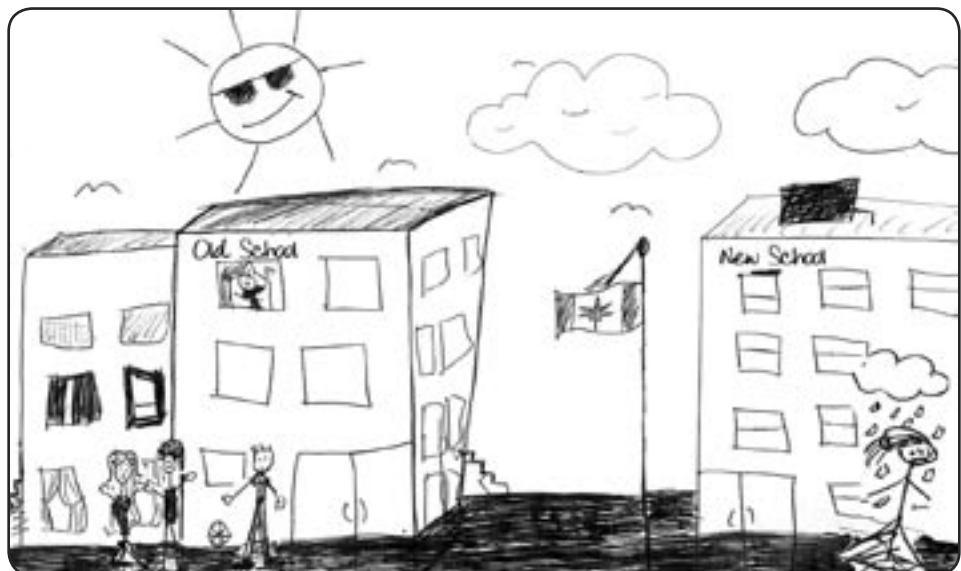


Illustration by Manda Jarvis and Laura Johnson

Separating siblings

Christie Reid

Every day, children are taken from their houses for their own separate reasons. But one thing that happens to them all is that if they have a brother and/or sister, there is about a 50% chance that they will be separated from their sibling. In some cases, this is the only way of operation, and maybe even sometimes it is the choice of the children and/or youth themselves. But usually it is not their choice, and it could be prevented with a little determination. This is not to say that there is not enough effort, for we can vouch for all the workers and volunteers out there, but with enough effort from everyone, we should be able to find a way for these siblings to stay together.

There are a great number of reasons that children and youth would be better off with their siblings. One of these reasons is most plainly companionship. If a child and/or youth is brought out of care into a totally different home they are going to experience a state of fright where they don't know where they are or even who they are. For a period of time they are in shock, when nothing is normal or even familiar. A great way for a child and/or youth to deal with this is to be with someone who they are close to, and who they can talk to. A sense of familiarity would ease the child into a better state of relaxation. Another great reason is that they would not get stuck in a situation where they would have to live apart from their siblings and have arranged appointments to see each other—appointments that are not even

kept, scarce as they are.

A supervised visit with the parent/s and/or siblings is not uncommon though it often has to be at the convenience of the supervisor, aka the caseworker. We all know that every worker has a caseload, and it cannot be helped if there is something that comes up and plans have to be rearranged. But this puts the child and/or youth in a position where they feel that they are unimportant and their parents and/or siblings are not making an effort to see them, nor is their worker making an attempt to help them.

In conclusion, this all could be avoided with the simple effort to keep those who want to stay together, together. For those who try, it is much appreciated but it would be a great idea if we could find a way to keep these kids together.



Illustration by Manda Jarvis

Who am I?

Christie Reid

Is it not important for me as a person to know me best? For the one in question to know their own thoughts and feelings like no one else? In most cases, this proves true, but not mine I am afraid. Not mine at all. I seem to be sitting in this space, to which I've returned, blank of all thoughts. A suction of no return, evaporating the personality I knew so well. Lost within. Gasping for air, only to receive lungs full of pain.

“I am me, and that is who I need.”

I linger among those around me. Drifting from person to person, seeing, hearing, feeling nothing, the heartbeat within my soul diminishing to a dull tap. So very unlike the healthy beat it once was. All due to one simple question, which no one can answer: Who am I?

I feel as though I have no face. Living in these years with no real feeling. Floating around to find where I belong, to find where I am loved, and am able to love back.

Tears dampen the face of no identity, giving a damp realization that I am me. I need no one, I ask of no one. I am me, and that is who I need. So I climb out of the darkness to show the world the face within, never to return.

Placements

Manda Jarvis

I think you should have a say in where CAS places you. I know there are not a lot of foster homes, but you should still have a say in where you go. For example, if you live in Halifax and they want to move you to New Brunswick, you should be able to say NO. Even something minor like Halifax to Dartmouth, you should still have a say. Some people are scared to say no to their social workers, but they shouldn't be. Your social worker is supposed to help you and listen to you.



Illustration by Trevor Dakins

What Needs to Change

Money

Manda Jarvis

I know CAS doesn't have much money in the budget but I think the allowances are unfair. When you're 12 and under, you get \$5 to \$15 a month, 13 to 15 year olds get \$25 a month, and 16 and up get \$40 a month. When you're 16 you can get a job, but when you're 13, 14, or 15 you can't.

Sometimes you're lucky and Sobeys will hire you as a cart-pusher, but that isn't much.



More money, fewer problems

Tina Doucette

We need more money for personals—not the dollar store stuff, or having to share shampoos or anything. Some people don't go out a lot so they depend on the house to entertain them but they can't do anything because they don't get any extra money. So if we get extra money to go and do things there won't be so many problems like fights because we won't be cranky so then there won't be so many people getting charged and getting kicked out.

\$\$

Ashley Wanamaker

Kids in foster care need money. Most of them aren't old enough to get a job or to be able to make their own money and the \$25 a month that I got was not enough. Like, what if you want to go to the movies or do something? (Everything you want to do in life involves money.) I don't think \$25 a month will cut that. Social workers do give you activity money but by the time you get the money (because it's sent in the mail), the activity that you wanted to do is already over, like your friends goin' to the movies. So, all in all, I just think kids should get more money to do things, and for personals. Cause if you need tampons or anything you can't get them if you've run out of money.

Going out of the province or just next door

Ammy Purcell

This is a big deal when you're in care. You can't go anywhere without your worker doing a background and abuse records check on the parents and for the person you're staying with, even if they're family.

When I was in care I had to get a background check on my best friend who I have known since I was 3 and her mother before I could stay there, and I wasn't even allowed to go. When I wanted to go to my cousins' house in Alberta, they did a check on them too and that was really embarrassing for me because I felt like they thought I didn't feel safe going there. So, in my opinion, the background check is really stupid because you know where you're going and if you trust them and have no reason not to, the worker should trust your decision.

Fixing group homes

Tina Doucette

I have an idea that would help living in group homes. You kind of put anybody where you can fit them, but what if you had certain homes for certain people? Say, like I go to school and somebody moves in, and they don't go to school and they do drugs. That will rub off on me and probably some of the other girls there.

What they do now is most people who go into group homes go to the Reigh Allen Centre to be summed up for three months. You should still do that, but you should categorize it. Maybe people who go to school and follow the rules should be put in one, and people who go to school sometimes and don't always follow the rules in another, and people who don't go to school and are always on the run in another. That would make a big difference. So, if you would take my ideas and think about them, that would be great.

Alex says that another way to fix group homes is by improving the staff. *"People that change their personality when they come to work in a group home kinda make up this character, like, ya know, they'll just harp about not swearing but when they close the door, they're cursing and swearing, ya know what I mean? I really don't like people that aren't real. When people aren't fake, then I respect them. Like Leon. He works at all the different houses but he doesn't change the way he is. Most people who act the same way get respect all the time."*

"People are supposed to be helping you with your problems, but most people come out worse. Most people end up on the streets or just total idiots. Most people don't really fare too well in a group home, so what's the point? People need to actually change."

Why do you think people come out worse?

"Because they didn't really take responsibility: they all try to blame the staff for everything, absolutely everything. And they weren't getting the right kind of help. If you apply the same rules to every person, then, basically, it doesn't work...You would have to have more specialized places."

Where group home funding should go

Christie Reid

A lot of the youth today get stuck in a situation they have backed into and can't get out of, but there is hope. The system has set up homes and shelters for those in this situation. Though these are not always the ideal places for the youth to be living, they are always there to help those in need.

Their financial state is not always the best. There is money for the bus tickets and food, the activities and the programs, but there are needs that seem to be missing. If you were to put yourself in the position of one of the youth in these centres, you would see drab, cold rooms with metal everywhere. Not that the looks matter, but the floors are cold and the place is dirty. Living quarters are not always kept in a state of healthy living and the facilities are also cold and dirty. The blankets provide little warmth, and the beds are nothing but a pile of springs. Although these comforts are better than living on the streets, the hygiene is not much better. The food is made with no sanitary precautions taken, and sickness spreads through the houses fast for there is little prevention against illnesses.

If there was some more money to be put into the houses and facilities they could put it towards the prevention of illness and the cleaning of the facilities. Towards warmer blankets and half decent beds. These are little demands, for these are not essential to the survival of the youth but these are just comments about the way people actually live.



Illustration by Brandon Farmer

Sending people home, and then changing their mind

Ammy Purcell

My experience with this topic was very difficult. Okay. Let's start from the beginning.

I was in care for a year and 6 months. At the first of July 2003 they let me go back to live with my dad. They said we had made good progress in our therapy sessions and we had been getting along well enough for me to go home. After I moved back home, Dad decided he didn't need to go to therapy anymore and we didn't need the counselling we were getting. But I still went to therapy.

After about 6 months my social worker asked me to have a meeting with her and I thought it was just a regular check up. We went to Wendy's for supper and just out of nowhere she tells me she wants me to go back in care because it wasn't working out at home. Right there I told her there was no way I was going back.

It was just pissing me off more and more. The way I see it is CAS waited until I was completely settled back at home and then it felt like they tried to rip me back out again. It was late December then (just before Christmas) and I was turning 16 in February and I knew they couldn't take me after that so I just kept on saying no and ignoring what they were saying until they couldn't do anything about it. I got lucky there because if I were a few months younger I would have had no choice. They would have just come and gotten me just like that.

I know sometimes it's good for the kids not to have a choice, but they shouldn't just take someone away from their family after getting them used to where they're placed. Send them back home and then try to do it all over again. They should never send kids home until they know for sure that everyone is ready to be back for good.

The Government

Shawna Comeau

The government is everything. They practically make all the rules. The government does different things: they clean up the city, take care of the money, and they also do the paving of the roads and stuff like that. But most of the time they just sit on their butts and do nothing, and just make it worse for us. Personally, I don't like them. They are a part of everything, like the prime minister and the liberals and, frankly, they don't do anything for you.

Chris Cruickshanks

I'm in this program to talk about kids in foster care and why they can't go home. I think the government thinks that you have to live in a perfect neighbourhood with a white picket fence. I just think they want things to go their way, or not at all.

What should the government do to help out group-home and foster kids more?

Alicia: "More money and less staff, because they're getting paid like how much? and we get \$200 grocery money for 6 people living in a house. It's not fair."

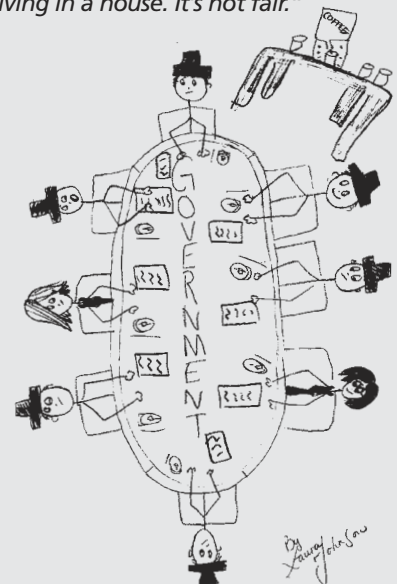


Illustration by Laura Johnson

Pay attention!

Brandon Farmer

A foster parent should pay more attention because their children could be on drugs or anything. You could be sick and they won't know what is wrong with you. You could be missing and they won't even notice. You could be coming home with bumps and bruises. You could be badly hurt. That is why your foster parent should pay attention.

I think they should listen to what we say because you could be trying to say something important and they will not understand. And someone or something could be hurt or damaged.



Illustration by Brandon Farmer

What CAS should do...

Tina Doucette

One thing CAS could do to help us out a bit is occasionally check on the social workers. For example, some social workers never come to visit, never call or answer e-mails, and that really sucks. Another thing they could do is check and not give one social worker so many caseloads. CAS could also get kids out of their homes before it's too late. I mean, get them out before something really disastrous happens, like they might be sent to the hospital.

More choices

Brandon Farmer

I think that you should talk to your worker more often, like just to let them know how you are doing, and stuff like if you need anything because if you keep checking with them you might get more choices.

I think that you should have more choices because it's not like it's your fault you're in care. You should have just as many choices as you had at home.

Slowness

Elyse Saulnier

Why slowness at The Children's Aid Society is not good is simply this: the child who the worker has feels forgotten about, mad, frustrated and stressed out. This is not a good thing because when the child was at home, they could have felt this way and it may have made them do or act in certain ways to get noticed.

Some people told me that social workers are slow because they have too many kids. If that is the case then what I think should happen is this: When a new social worker comes they should have to get 1 to 2 kids from social workers who have too many as well as a few new kids who haven't had a social worker yet.

Also, if a social worker takes too long to do something, like getting you a tutor, it can have a big impact on your schoolwork. If the child is struggling and needs help but their social worker is too busy, then it will not be good when a test comes and the child does not know what to do. This is why I think slowness is not a good thing at all at The Children's Aid Society.



Illustration by Elyse Saulnier

Falling off the ladder

Tony Beaumier

It all started 3 weeks ago when I lost my placement at my foster home. Since that day things have gone down the drain. I did some things that I regret deeply. I don't have a long term goal in mind, and I don't have a new placement yet, but that's not the bottom of the ladder yet! I lost my job, and I dropped out of school. So as of right now I'm not doing anything with my life.

Hopefully things will start to change, because I got a wakeup call from my friend, Andrew Safer.

Since then I went back to school, I went back to the Newsletter and I moved in with my mom. And I've decided to join the reserves.

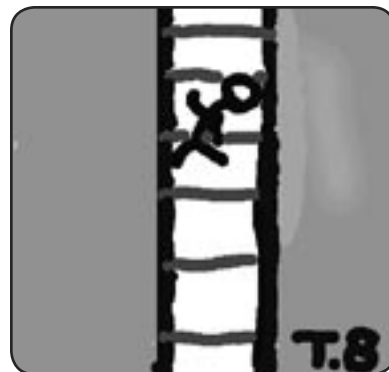


Illustration by Tony Beaumier



Tony Beaumier tells Mr. David Morse, Minister of Community Services, about the Newsletter at the Youth Achievement Awards in November 2003.

More Thoughts, Poems and News

Why again?

Lucas Kreft

The reason I am doing this newsletter is because I had such a strong and positive experience doing it last year. This year there will be new people joining it and that leads to gaining new relationships with strangers, and expanding relationships with friends.

“I had such a strong and positive experience doing the Newsletter last year.”

Another reason I am doing this again is because I had so much fun doing it last year. I’ve learned new things, and in the future I plan on learning more and taking those new skills on an everyday battle.

Young love

Christie Reid

Isn’t it funny how when you’re young, you see everything in an array of black and white? Everything is one way or the other. Good or bad, dark or light, in love or out of love. Pain is a fairytale that is told when it is time for bed, as imaginary as the Tooth Fairy or Santa Claus.

Parents shelter you from the real world, hoping that the innocence inside will stay the bright light that it is when you were born.

HOW WRONG THEY WERE!

You grow older and the black starts to overtake the white, the white surrenders to the brute strength, the black smothers it, making a shade of grey. Lines blur, fading the border lines of what is what. Pain takes over, drowning you in a pool of sorrow.

The one person you live for... the only one who loves you... breaks your heart and leaves you to bleed: to cry your tears of blood.



Ammy Purcell, Chris Cruickshanks, Tina Doucette, and Trevor Dakins meet with the Standing Committee on Community Services in the Legislative Committee Offices in November 2003.

In front of the MLAs

Tony Beaumier

The morning that all of us from the Newsletter were in a meeting with the big timers was a great moment, because they let this small but large at heart group take two hours of their time to listen to what we think is wrong and how to fix it.

I thought that all the Newsletter members got to say whatever they had on their minds which is a great thing to accomplish in front of the MLAs around Nova Scotia. Now all we need to talk to is a popular talk show host such as Oprah, Ricki, or

maybe even Jerry Springer.

One thing that I didn’t like was when one of the MLAs was very rude and just basically told us to collect bottles and do car washes, etc...

Note: To read the Hansard transcript of this meeting with the Standing Committee on Community Services, go to: www.youthnewsletter.net, go to the “About Us” page, and click on the link.

Living life is like playing the piano

Christie Reid

Living life is like playing the piano. Your fingers drift like years. Playing all the same notes but not necessarily all the right ones.

No one can ever know the feelings that soar through me, like an eagle with the freedom to do as it pleases. The thoughts I carry echo through my mind like the Canadian loon on a foggy summer morning upon a lake of mercury. My spirit clips with the paddle upon my journey across a land so pure. These are the images and sounds I feel and I hear. With every passing moment my heart

beats like the drum upon the hills, the voices of the mountains whisper to me. Painting images with the colours of the wind.

May this be my past, or could this be my future? Living in the serenity of nature.

Then I wake up... Cars rushing by, smog upon the sunrise, sirens going off in the background. No longer can I hear the drum, no longer can I see the colours. My world is a palate of black and white. A palate which only man can create.



Trevor's view of the Wednesday night meetings

I'm me!

Jamie Johnson

When I think of school I think of just trying to be myself and if people can't see that, then I don't care. And I don't care if I'm popular or cool. I'm who I am and that's all that matters to me. And no boy or person is going to change that. NEVER!!

"I don't care if I'm popular or cool. I'm who I am and that's all that matters to me."

Also, when I think of people being told what to do—like change your shirt by a teacher or any other person—I think that teens should pick: if they don't do their homework, then they fail. That shouldn't be something that the teacher decides.

Alone

L.A. MacIsaac

As I sit here in a place I once knew as a home, I feel alone. I am scared and hurt with nowhere to turn. The faces laugh at me, shrill and high. Their laughter haunts me in an eerie sort of way. The blows come fast, the pain comes harsh. The words sting all over like a swarm of bees.

How can someone be so cruel to their own kin, lashing and scratching? Love comes rarely. Hate is a factor. I have no one to turn to, no one to love. I reach for help and no one comes. A single solitary tear escapes. My breath begins to grow short, as everything blurs to black. My heart beats once more in a response to the hand touching my face. A helping hand that comes much too late.

Junior Counsellor Program

Manda Jarvis

When about 10 of us from the Newsletter went to Maitland for a day, we had a lot of fun. Well I know I did anyways. We got to watch a martial arts presentation, go snow shoeing, listen to two people play guitar and sing, make collages, and draw. So the day was pretty full. There were a few people there who are involved in the program, and surprisingly everyone got along really well. When Andrew told us there were going to be other kids there, I really didn't think everyone would get along so well, because we were kinda entering their territory. I think the program is a lot of fun. It gives kids a chance to chill and be themselves, make new friends, and try new things.

Manda, Laura, and Jamie interviewed two of the youth involved with the program, and the social worker who coordinates it, and this is what they had to say:

Alex O'Neill: "The Junior Counsellor Program is for kids that would never have the chance to do things like horseback riding. It gives them the opportunity to do more, and get them out of the house and things like that that they'd never do in their life type of thing."

Tabatha Rafuse: "It's to help kids for when they get older to be ready for job experiences and to help them get along with other people."

Stacey Greenough, a social worker who coordinates the program, further explained: "It's designed to help kids stay in their homes if they can as opposed to coming into care. It's to try and stabilize them in school and at home, and in the community. We're trying to provide all of them with different experiences like music, art, wilderness activities, and job searching and training for work."



The tables were turned in April 2004 when the Newsletter Project did role play presentations to the Department of Community Services and CAS contract staff. Above is "A School Visit".

Left to Right, Foreground: Ammy Purcell (social worker), Dawn DeWolfe (mother), Stacey Greenough (youth), and Brandon Farmer (Principal) *Background:* Ashley Wanamaker, Tina Doucette, Manda Jarvis, & Laura Johnson.

Moods

"What gets me in a **happy** mood is when I'm allowed to go on the computer and when I'm allowed to stay out later. What gets me out of a happy mood is when I hear bad news and when someone talks about me behind my back. What I like about Happy moods is I stay out of trouble and I smile."—Brandon

"When you're **happy**, you feel good inside, and about yourself. Also when you're happy, it could be about something that happened to you. Being happy is a good thing and makes your heart big and also being happy, you can help make other people happy."—Shawna

"I get **excited** when I hear I get to see my brothers, or when I get new clothes or when I hear good news."—Manda

"When people are **confused** they don't know what they are doing. When this emotion is triggered, people feel small inside."—Lucas

"Every human should feel **love**. When you feel this emotion, all stress can be gone in a few seconds. When you experience love, you would have another person to share it with."—Lucas

"When you are **isolated**, you are stuck in a place you can't escape from."—Laura

"If you're **cheery**, you would probably smile a lot."—Laura

"It makes me happy when I'm **wanted**. I feel like I mean something to someone. When I have a good home I feel like I have a place to run."—Jamie

"When I'm **mad** I don't want to talk to anyone. Also, I feel like crap. And if someone tries to talk to me I just start to yell at them."—Jamie

"When I think of the word **"relaxed"**, I think of coming home from school, lying down on the couch and watching TV. But for some people, relaxed means just to slow down for a little while."—Ammy

"Today I was **angry**. I'm **grouchy** with everyone. Sometimes I don't even talk when people are talking to me and it's not necessarily them.

What I think is making me so **angry** is I'm in grade 10 and I haven't been doing well, Christmas is here in a week and I spend it in a group home by myself and it all builds up and something triggers it, maybe like staff or Andrew just asking for my assignment.

So what I'm trying to say is: you can never tell what's wrong with someone till you ask them."—Tina

"If a child thinks he is **not wanted** and **not loved**, it will make that child feel like there's no reason to live."—Brandon



The group brainstorming a title for this Newsletter with Lisa Neily, Graphic Designer, facilitating.

Clockwise from left to right: Lucas Kreft, Trevor Dakins, Lisa Neily (standing), Laura Johnson, Manda Jarvis, Jamie Johnson, Tony Beaumier, Christie Reid, Seth Dakins, Tina Doucette, Ashley Wanamaker, Ammy Purcell and Shawna Comeau.



In five sessions at the Khyber Digital Media Centre, participants learned how to scan photos for both print and the Web, how to draw using the computer (some of the drawings in this Newsletter were created at the Khyber), and how to put articles and images directly onto web pages for the site. Check it out at: **www.youthnewsletter.net!**

Seated from front to back: Brandon Farmer, Trevor Dakins, Ashley Wanamaker, Ammy Purcell, Shawna Comeau, Jamie Johnson and Laura Johnson. Standing: Mark Harrington, Web Design Instructor.

"Anger, Confusions, Betrayal, & Sadness" (background image) by Ammy Purcell

Collages - Present & Future



In these collages, we show what the present is for us, and how we see the future. Here are some of the things we came up with for the **Present**: Nowhere is safe; Ladder to success; Running out of time; No parking; Kids fighting; Birth control; Confused footsteps; Hell in the trenches; School—Need to learn; Blame; Skipping class; Being moved; Leaving stuff behind; Tears; Bad habits; Supervised visits.

And the **Future**...: Planning; Good families; Self-esteem; Family in van; Money; More freedom, less rules; Footsteps are straight; Dreams; Finding yourself; Independent; Achievement; Babies; Self-control; *Giving help*; Faith; Looking ahead; Maturing.



Tina, Shawna, and Trevor



Christie, Manda, Jamie, and Laura



Ammy, Ashley, and Chris



Tony, Brandon, and Lucas



Ammy Purcell, 16



Manda Jarvis, 15



Elyse Saulnier, 15



Tony Beaumier, 19



Tina Doucette, 16



Brandon Farmer, 14



Trevor Dakins, 18



Seth Dakins



Jamie Johnson, 13



Laura Johnson, 14



Lucas Kreft, 18



Christie Reid, 16



Ashley
Wanamaker, 15



Shawna Comeau,
16



Chris
Cruickshanks, 15



Charles
McLaughlin, 16

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Canada-Nova Scotia Skills & Learning Framework
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Children's Aid Society Foundation
Coaching Platform – Web-based collaboration space
Department of Community Services (DCS)
Alfred Doucette – Mediation
Halifax Youth Foundation
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John Hartling, YEP – Guest Speaker
Dianne Hussey – Launch Coordinator
Junior Counsellor Program – Trip to Maitland
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Elizabeth Miller, CAS

Marvin Moore – Photography (launch)
Lisa Neily, Graphic Designer – Newsletter
North Branch Library – Tutoring
Nova Trophy – Awards
Holly Parsons – Digital photography (collages)
Petals – Flowers (launch)
Sophie Piliczuk – Art Instructor, AGNS
Jennifer Prozesky – Guest Speaker
Reigh Allen Centre – Interviews
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Bill Turpin – Interviewing Coach
Youth Employability Project

"The Voice of Youth In Care" logo designed by Trevor Dakins and the rest of the Youth in Care Newsletter Team

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