

the VOICE



... of Youth in Care

Issue 05 of the Youth In Care Newsletter Project | April 2005

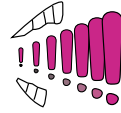


Front left: **Tina Doucette, Cyndi Rafuse, Brandon Farmer**
Top left: **Ammy Purcell, Trevor Dakins, Andrew Safer, Kyle Clayton, Leo Hébert, John Walker, (above) Andrew Nickerson, and Justin Kane**

Missing from photo: **Tony Beaumier, Sarah Johnson, Alex MacIntosh, Tiffany Magionas, Kevin Paris, Amanda Sprague, Alesha Stevens, and Candace Zinn**

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"I know that there are parts of the system that definitely need to be changed and that's why I'm so happy that you guys are doing this." -Misty

With this issue of **The Voice** the Youth in Care Newsletter Project is celebrating its fifth year. A lot of effort went into this! Youth in care and former youth in care living in group homes, foster homes, independent living, and in some cases, living at home. We meet every week and we talk about, write about, and illustrate what it's like living in the system. This year 18 contributed to the Newsletter and 14 of us stuck with it to the end. We're all teenagers, from 15 to 19 years old, with the exception of one guy who keeps coming back. He's 20.

Thank You!

We want to say a big **Thank You!** to our financial sponsors who believe in what we're doing. Both this year and last year, our primary sponsor was the **Department of Community Services** through the **Canada-Nova Scotia Skills and Learning Framework**. We'd also like to thank **Youth Employability Project** and **The Children's Aid Society of Halifax Foundation** for their support.

This year we also started the School Credit Supplement Project, which provides one-on-one guidance and assistance with individualized projects for school credit. Thank you, Gordon Foundation for Children and Youth, Halifax Youth Foundation, and The Children's Aid Society of Halifax Foundation for making it possible to do this!

In a few cases we have used pseudonyms to protect the youths' identities.

Please drop by our web site when you get a chance! www.youthnewsletter.net



The youth we interviewed had a lot to say. As you're reading this Newsletter, you'll see their quotes at the end of some of the articles.

Hearing What Others Have to Say

In February we visited Reach, a HeartWood program, at Windhorse Farm in Wentzell Lake (past Bridgewater), to interview other youth in care. We interviewed Kody, Bethany, Ben-

jamin, Molly, Thomas, Stephanie, and Nadine, and two former youth in care: Adrianna MacKenzie and Misty Thibeault.



Interviewers and interviewees (l-r): Front: **Tina Doucette, Tiffany Magionas, Kyle Clayton, Amanda Sprague** Middle: **Thomas Eisan, Cyndi Rafuse, Misty Thibeault** Back: **Kody Jefferson, John Walker, Bethany Murphy, Adrianna MacKenzie, Leo Hébert**

Why do youth end up in care?

- * Parents have died
- * Emotional, physical or sexual abuse
- * Neglect
- * Parents are unable to supervise or ensure the youth's safety
- * Parents can't handle the youth's unmanageable behaviour

We would like to thank our sponsors:



Halifax Youth Foundation

This Is Our Life

Flash Forward

By Candace Zinn

As I try to do better I notice my life flash before my eyes. Then I wonder: Am I good enough? Is everyone better than me? Does my opinion count? I struggle and pray for better days. It's almost like no one understands me or even wants to take the time to listen to what I have to say. Feelings like desperation and guilt keep me down and keep me farther away from my goals. I feel trapped and unable to escape from society. I live in a world where everything revolves around care plans and expectations... Some time has passed and I feel great. I have everything I need plus more. It takes time to commit and time to adjust. You live, you learn, you wait, you get results...

Alone on Christmas

Day By Amanda Sprague

To a lot of people, Christmas is showing people you love them and it's supposed to be fun and happy. But to me it's just another lonely day. There's a lot of people in the world who get to wake up with the people they love and care about. There are a lot of people who don't. I'm one of those people. Every Christmas morning for the last four years I've been waking up in a group home all by myself. It gets pretty lonely and boring but I'm pretty much used to it now. It's not that bad when you wake up with staff who you like and get along with. It's even better for me this year because I get to see my family and spend a couple of hours with my Mom this year.



by Andrew Nickerson

A Cry for Help

By Tiffany Magionas

The silent whispers of children running through my mind. Suddenly, the whispers turn into tears, the pain and sorrow sent deep into my soul. I cannot help for I am trapped in a world full of war, racism, abuse, and neglect. One day, though, I will have enough strength to save the ones who never knew the love they needed or craved.



by Candace Zinn

Can't Take It Anymore

By Hope

My mind is racing like a car on a racetrack. It is going 200 mph—the feeling you get when you know something is about to happen. That is how I feel. There is nothing left for me to do. My family abandoned me. My life is ruined forever. It is just too much, all at once. I can't take it any more. My heart is pounding, my adrenaline is rising. I feel faint, overwhelmed. Gone now, I am free at once. In peace. No one can hurt me for now the wall I started to build as a child is finished.



By Alesha Stevens

Family
Social worker
Group homes
Foster homes
Care plans
Short-term goals
Long-term goals
Relationships
Friendships
Staff
Education
Rules

By Tiffany Magionas

Nice
Funny
Beautiful
Hard worker
Trustworthy
Loves to have fun
Confused
Unhappy
Lonely
Scared
Tired
Shy

By Andrew Nickerson

Barely any allowance/money
for things
Not enough stuff to do
Chaos
Lots of troubled youth
Meet lots of new people
You can be moved around a lot
Lots of rules
Lots of bad influences
Living with people you've
never met
Social workers

Growing Up with a Drunk

By Hope

"Why don't you stop drinking for once, and listen to what I have to say?"

"Who do you think you are telling me what to do? Don't you ever think you're why I drink?"

Every night was the same. She would drink, then we would fight. My patience grew thin for I was sick of this pattern. The pattern of staying up all night, searching the ditches, and calling all of the bars in search of my mother.

My body and mind could not take it anymore. I was sick and did not know what to do. Suddenly, my life was worthless.

I thought that maybe if I was more like her, she would be proud. Then if she was proud, my life would not be worthless. That first sip I will never forget. It burned so much that my first reaction was: run to the bathroom as fast as I can. Then another sip and another trip to the bathroom. It was horrible.



Reality

By Tiffany Magionas

Reality, knowing the truth.
It is too hard, isn't it?
So you run, run away from the truth.

Denial: It grabs whatever is in front of you.
151 Lambs, PCP
Why? Because you are too scared
To face yourself to look
In the mirror.

You do not even know who you are.
You have become
Your own worst enemy.
No, it's too late.
May you rest in peace.

Understanding

By Leo Hébert

Understanding is a key element of being in care because if your social worker doesn't understand you there won't be a point for you to get help from if they don't know what to help you with. Staff are easier to get along with as well when they understand where you are coming from. Understanding also works with residents... understanding when they have gone too far and understanding when to back off. Understanding also works with par-

ents—you have a life and cannot phone them every minute of every day. But understanding also comes from you—to understand why you are there and to achieve certain goals you have set for yourself. And that everyone else in your home has their own business and that you should stick to your own stuff.

Keep Siblings Together!

By Tina Doucette

Separating siblings is a hard thing to go through especially when they're young and they don't really know what's going on. I have a brother. We were really young when we were taken but we were lucky not to get separated and that helped a lot. I would have been devastated if I was plopped down with people I didn't know without my brother. Now we are separated and I only see him maybe once a month and I only call him here and there.

I know there are not a lot of homes that can take two to three children at a time but it would help. Maybe there should be more homes that will take siblings together.

Now, adopting siblings is different. People don't usually want to adopt more than one kid. So they'll get separated and grow up without each other. Visitations may be put in place but it's not the same as growing up together.

My Family

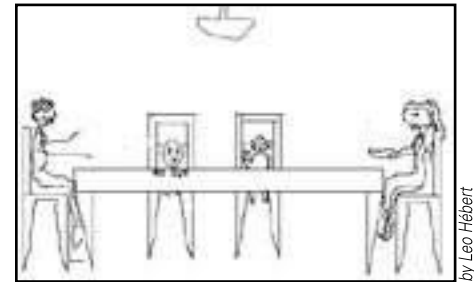
By Tina Doucette

I've been in so many homes that I can't count. I don't have a biological family. So when I go to a home and get comfortable, they seem like part of my bigger family.

I went in care when I was six years old. I lived with my aunt and uncle for almost six years. So I got used to calling them Mom and Dad and my cousins, my brother and sister.

I lived with my foster mom for two years. I called her "Mom" because I found that she truly wanted me with her and she would do anything to help me out.

When I was put into a placement I was refusing to go home. The woman I stayed with talked to me and I realized home was best for me at that point. I thank her for helping me go back home and I'm pretty sure my aunt does too.

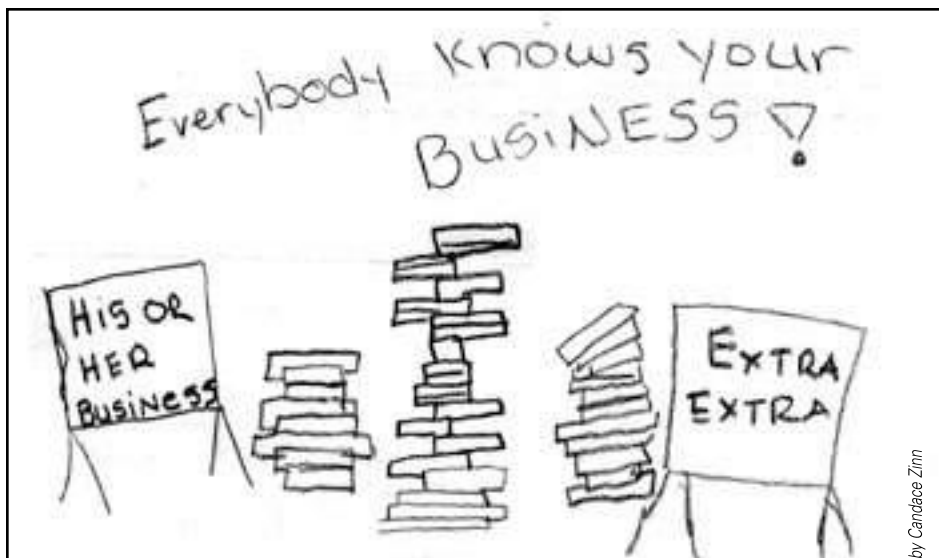


I'm still really close to my aunt and uncle. I still call them Mom and Dad. So my Mom's family looks at me no more or no less than a part of the family.

When I lived with my Mom and Dad I had so many foster brothers and sisters and most of them keep in touch.

Even though I don't have a true family, that doesn't mean that I don't have one. It's my family and I'm happy with it.

"There is no more strength, no more energy. But no matter what, I need to still hold on with all the strength I have left, for I am going to win this battle of life and death."—Tiffany



by Candace Zinn

Everybody Knows Your Business...

By Brandon Farmer

I don't think that people should know your business because there is stuff that you don't want other people to know about your life and why you are in care. For example, how you got taken away from your parents. You don't want people to know that. It's no one's business but yours, your mom's, your dad's, and that's it.

When you go to a new school your social worker tells them that you are in Children's Aid's care and then there are going to be questions and it is not their business. Now, what if you did something and you are trying to get back on track and there are people that hear things at the school, or hear it at home, that I did something that I feel bad for doing and I don't want everyone to know. I know that my social worker needs to tell the Principal and VP but you don't have to tell the whole world. Sometimes I feel bad for myself because people keep asking me: why are you in care? Other people tell me that they wish they were in care but you don't know how bad it is till you're in it.

I think that when in care ALL YOUR BUSINESS is your business, no one else's. And yeah, when you are in care, yes, you get money to get new clothes and you get a roof over your head but what you don't get is trust. So this is what people SHOULD NOT KNOW—YOUR BUSINESS!!!

"I was in grade two when they took me. They came to the school and they just took me out of school and they didn't really inform me. They just go 'Oops, sorry!' I think part of the reason they really didn't explain too much was that I was probably too young to understand. They took me to the house and stayed for maybe an hour and then just left and I mean I was bawling and freaking. I totally didn't understand why I had to be there. I was, like, fix the problem at home, I don't want to be here."—Misty



Ammy and Trevor discuss the design of the Newsletter cover.



by John Walker

After 19, you're on your own unless you're in college or university.



photo by Gil McMullin

Christmas party at Phoenix Learning Employment Centre, December 2004
Front (l-r): Dianne (volunteer), Candace, Cyndi, Amanda, Ammy Back (l-r): Andrew, Tiffany, Leo, John, Trevor, Tina, Justin, Andrew, Heather (volunteer), Lisa

STEREOTYPING

They Think We're All Bad Kids



by Trevor Dakins

By Brandon Farmer

Being in care is like being a criminal because when you are a criminal people judge you the wrong way. Same as being in care. Just because you are in care, you are a bad person because they just judge you. They don't get to know you. And they don't understand why you are in care. **Some people think that CAS is for bad kids but it is not. It is for the kids who need some part in their life.**

By Andrew Nickerson

There is a lot of stereotyping of group home kids. One year ago I lived in a group home in Halifax and there was a break and enter just up the street. The police never had any evidence so they came to the group home and questioned all of us about where we were that night. We all had proof of where we were. Just because we are group home kids they thought we might have had something to do with it. They didn't question all the kids who live with their parents.

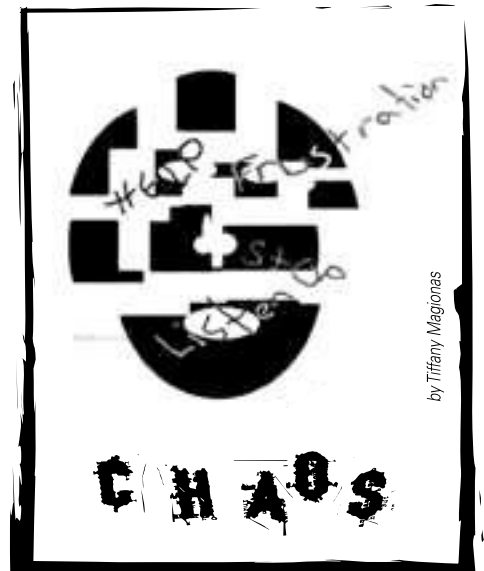


"All teenagers are eXperimenting with drugs and alcohol and having seX. But people think only kids in care are doing these things." -Adrianna

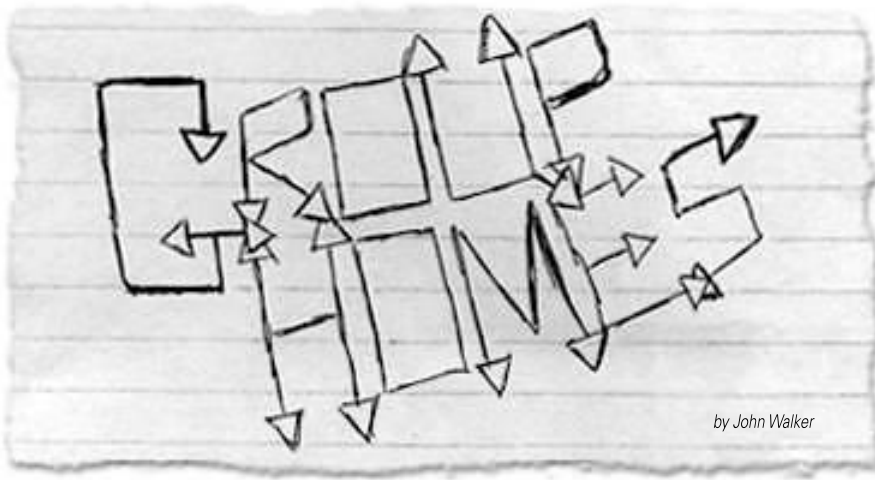
"There are a lot of stereotypes against the residents in group homes. For eXample, we're not allowed to have stereos because of what previous residents did.

I don't care that people judge me. I'm an individual. I like to go against society; that's why I'm wearing pink." -Thomas

"Just because you're in care doesn't mean you're an outcast." -Kody



by Tiffany Magionas



CHAOS

By Andrew Nickerson

In group homes there is lots of chaos. There are residents fighting all the time. Residents are always fighting with staff. Most of the staff can get the problem solved but some staff just argue back and make the situation worse. Quite a few kids in care have anger problems and when this happens it is not very pretty. Some group home residents have to share rooms and there is a lot of chaos between them and their stuff.

One time I was mad at my roommate for wearing my t-shirt without my permission and bringing it back with a grease stain so I told him off. If I was in charge of care, I would have it so every resident had their own room.

We Need More to Do!

By Cyndi Rafuse

We need more entertainment—like a basketball net—something to help the youth when they are bored. These things will help the youth when they need to get out of the house. Physically active lifestyles can help youth deal with depression and anger problems! I find more youth get in trouble when they are bored so if you give us something to do we won't go out and get in trouble! I think the group home will benefit very much from having outside activities like basketball.

By Kyle Clayton

A typical day for me consists of going to school, coming home, completing homework and doing nothing. If we had something to do, any kind of activity (excluding chores, but including video games) whether it be physical or mental would

be great. Half the reason why adolescents do the stuff they do is because we're bored. We (the youth of group homes) are deprived of any luxury of being an adolescent. I personally think that the group home environment should be more "resident friendly".

These Rules Suck!

By Kyle Clayton

The consequences that are given out are more generalized than they need to be. Someone at my home broke the phone and I got punished for something I didn't do. My consequence for not breaking the phone was that I am not allowed to use the resident line, no "outings", no extra-curricular activities and I can only have "x" amount of time on the staff line (reason being: important phone calls). It is not fair to other people who respect the rules, who abide by them, to be consequence for doing the right action. The reason we get angry is the rules just plain suck. They (the rules) need to be revisited, revised, then replayed to see if they work. I myself am not going to be punished for someone else's stupid crap. The law clearly states (to a certain degree) that we are individuals. But that's not what's happening with these rules. The public should be aware of what goes on.

"Treating people as individuals is a tremendous way to improve group homes because it's wrong when someone messes everything up for everyone else. The person who caused the trouble should be the one who is punished - not everyone else." - Justin Kane

Suggestions

By Tiffany Magionas

Staff need to start working with the youth and not behind their backs. Ask us what we think will help. They should ask youth our input on home issues. The same treatment should not be applied to everyone. There needs to be better housekeeping (some houses are very dirty), a more stable work environment, a better support system, and food handling/cooking classes. And they need to learn that everyone is not the same.

Wish List By Justin Kane

More time to watch TV

Better Internet access

No logs

(We don't need to be written about 24/7)

Better bathrooms

Be allowed to have TVs and stereos

Be in a safe environment

**** Group Homes!

By Kevin Paris

From my point of view, I think that staff need more training at group homes. They don't help kids with anger, family problems, or health problems. When you ask for something that has to be approved, it doesn't get done for like a month. A lot of group homes don't have anything to keep the kids happy or just have something fun to do. A lot of group homes just take any kid. Some kids don't have problems to put them in group homes. Why do they have to write logs? Staff wouldn't like us to write about them everyday.

Thank You, Staff!

By Alesha Stevens

Group homes are very different from any other placements that I've been to. At first I didn't like them, but they have had an amazing impact on my life. I have met so many wonderful people and created a strong relationship with each and every one of them. I owe it all to them because if it wasn't for them I wouldn't be at the place where I am today. They have helped me to be the person I am today, strong, loving, caring and if I were to list all the others, well, let's just say there's not enough time. So all of the things that I have ever been successful at, I have all the staff to thank.

Dedicated to the staff at my group home.



"Group homes put an 'adult' face on you. They're more focused on being an adult and they put those responsibilities on you. Foster homes are more of a family situation which is better in the long run."
— Thomas

"The first month I was in a group home one of the girls was pregnant and she had a miscarriage, but she was having the miscarriage in the house. So she went to the doctor and they said you just have to have it naturally. She was in the room, screaming. That was very difficult. I'm from Halifax but before that I was living in Trenton, Nova Scotia which is a very small town. I didn't know anything about kids being pregnant. I didn't know anything about having sex. I didn't know anything about that kind of stuff. And then I come into this group home and it's like, Oh my God! She's having a miscarriage in the other room. That whole instability, things always changing. I didn't like that!" — Sanna

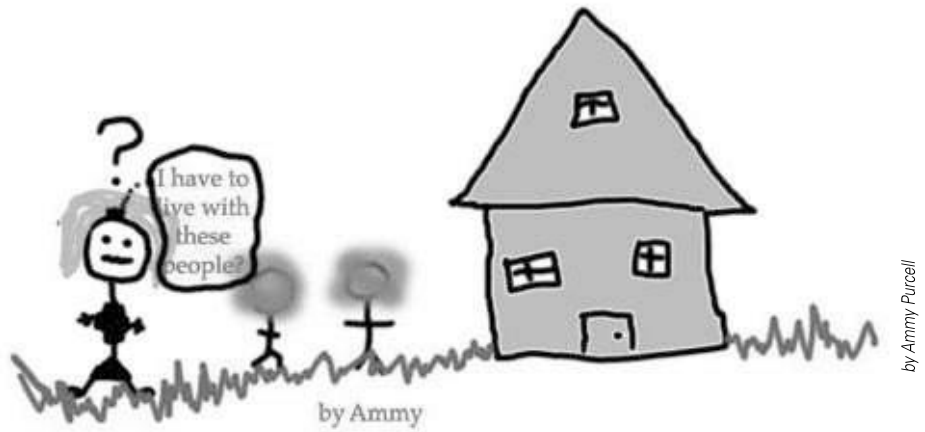
"If you're punching holes in the wall, you get attention. But if you're quiet they just forget about you." — Adrianna

"Group homes corrupt you: you want to be 'down' with other people, and to do that you have to cop some attitude like you're 'hard' or 'gangster'. Telling people that you will knock them out. That's what you have to do to survive, and be 'cool' in group homes.

No one actually has somewhere to look forward to going, so everyone is just running around trying to cause trouble and all that other stuff.

If you want to succeed in life a group home can help you. You can look at other people and see their situations and see their struggles and stuff and you can learn from them. But if you don't want to succeed, a group home can be pretty bad for you.

I want to work to get more group homes. There are not enough group homes."
— Thomas



by Ammy Purcell

Living with Strangers

By Cyndi Rafuse

Group homes are very hard to adjust to. It's very hard moving into a new house with a bunch of strangers. Not knowing their interests and personalities, it's hard trying to fit in and find true friends. For all you know, everything about that person could be a lie.

People can lie about their age, name, anything. You could really trust these people and they don't think twice about doing anything to hurt

you. I've lived at my group home for six months and there have been a lot of girls who have come and gone. But there is one girl who came about three months after I moved in and she was cool. She liked everything I did, talked the way I do, she was just like me and it was great. But a few months later she moved away. She came down for a visit and she was totally different. She hasn't figured herself out yet and it's not cool trying to make up all these lies. I haven't talked to her in two months, but I hope she found herself.

The Folly of Group Homes

By Alex MacIntosh

By the release of this newsletter, I will have been in care for 4 years. I look back at this period with mock awe, as I never thought it would turn out this way. You see, I had been a very angry person upon entering the system, and could see all the coping methods, and the de-escalation patterns, and the lies, and uselessness of it all.

Never mind the fact that everyday I went to school, people were perplexed as to why I was even in a group home. That I was so *likable*. So *normal*. The picture painted to my impressionable mind was that I wasn't likable, wasn't friendly, had nothing going for me, and would ultimately fail at what I was doing, because I could not abide by the rules. Also disregard the fact that I was the only one not running, drinking, or doing drugs of any kind. And, I was the only one actively going to school. Yet, somehow, these people with no idea about me, can come and ruin my own perceptions about myself, and claim a just reason? This is the folly of group homes.

I am the same person I was before I entered care. I had this belief that sprang up based on doubts cast on me. That there was some moment, some event that just changed me and that I would never be that person, so sure and

confident again. I'm still the little kid crying at CAS. I'm still the kid being cuffed and put in a paddy wagon by two hulking cops, and shipped to a group home. I'm still the kid who wants answers. But there is a problem. You can't get answers from clones. You can't get answers from people paid to play a role. You can't get answers from people who cannot fathom the questions.

And so, I decided to write something. I thought of doing something long and drawn out. Like a Manifesto. But, hey what does it matter? The same people that I want to read this, are the same people that will get mad and deny it too. These are the people that need to be finding another line of work. I'm not talking about all youth care workers. Some are personable. But it's the system they work within. They are told to conform themselves. To pretend like they know what's wrong with a kid mentally, and throw it in their face analytically. The people paid to bother you.

Conformity is bad. Conformity at the price of your future is worse.

Note: This article was significantly edited due to space limitations.

How to Improve a Group Home

By Candace Zinn

Extra activities:

Because then we would have something to do instead of being bored and going out and getting into trouble, and it's good exercise.

No logs:

Because we should be able to talk to the staff and tell them our problems without everyone having to know about them.

Treat people as individuals:

They should treat us like we're all different because we are. We don't want to be treated like group home kids.

Individual consequences:

We should all have different consequences because if someone does something, we shouldn't all have to take the blame for it and lose out on perks because of them.

Better personalities:

The staff should have better personalities. They should realize that we're teenagers and we have big personalities and some don't appreciate it.

Better food:

We should have food that we like. We should have an opinion about it, and what we like and don't like.

Flexibility with overnights:

We should be able to sleep over at boyfriends'/girlfriends' houses. They get to go home to their wives, husbands and boyfriends, so then they should understand that we need that too.

Better visiting hours:

We should be able to have people in from the time we wake up 'til the time we go to bed because we're teenagers and we're cool like that.



"Uncommon Law"

By Ammy Purcell

On Monday, February, 28, 2005 myself and a few other people from our group were invited to a very special event called "UnCommon Law" held by the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society. It was a chance for youth and people from the law profession to get to know more about each other and understand each other better. Youth from four community groups made presentations: us, Leave Out Violence, Deaf

Advocacy Association of Nova Scotia, and Phoenix Youth Programs. I was involved with the planning and I think the event turned out really great. I was really proud to be involved in something like this and I hope to be involved in future events like this one. It was a great learning experience and I know that everyone who came, left with some kind of knowledge that they didn't have before.

To read the article about this in The Society Record, go to: www.youthnewsletter.net/articles/halifax05/barristers.html

The "Justice" System

By Wayne Rooney

The justice system is crap. I'm being remanded to the CNSCF for hanging around with the wrong crowd. If you asked me and the co-accused what happened, and maybe even the victim, then maybe, just maybe, I wouldn't be here for 7 months. My bail was denied twice. I've been accused of a second robbery I wasn't even a part of, but there have been no questions asked. How do you think the truth can be identified to you, if the Legal Aid lawyers are calling you by a different name? To me the system is doing a terrible job.

There are other young adults out there stealing cars and being caught with kilos of drugs, but they get a slap on the wrist. That's all I have to say about the justice system. Besides this, instead of locking young adults away, maybe you should help them with their drug and alcohol problems first. Send them to rehab. If they don't have an addiction, they won't need to break the law.



Noise

By Justin Kane

Noise is everywhere. It can be good or bad, like music is a good noise and yelling or disturbing others is a bad noise. Sometimes in certain places there is lots of noise, like a hockey game. And some places have almost no noise, like the bottom of the ocean.

Foster Homes

Unfair!

By John Walker

I don't live in foster homes anymore, but when I did, I didn't really like it because I didn't feel at home. I always felt like their kids got treated better than I did and that they didn't buy me what I was supposed to get because I only got clothes for school and a few other things for Christmas and my birthday. I found that at group homes it's better 'cause everybody's treated the same.

The Good & the Bad

By Justin Kane

I'm writing about foster care—the good things and the bad things. Some good things are that you would have more privacy than in a group home and there are no logs and you're in a family environment. Some bad things are: the foster parents might put their kids before you, you don't know who you will be living with and the strangeness of being in a different home.

Report from the Trenches

By Bob Avanté

I'll start when I was first put into foster care. I was six years old. I remember the whole day. It wasn't a very good day. The foster parents' real children also lived there. I was accepted, but I always felt like I didn't belong there, like I wasn't a real part of the family. I was a very sorry/angry child. In that foster home I was never hurt physically or mentally.

In the second foster home, it was a very tragic time. I was there for approximately four years (8-12 years old). I was mentally and physically hurt everyday. That was very tragic, like I said. I never said anything 'til I was 12 years old. Social workers were blind. Foster parents would hide their problems, hide everything. Social workers would never suspect anything. No one investigated until I said something. In my last and final experience with a foster home, the events there were not pleasing either.

Foster homes expect you to be like them. They

try to control the youth. They all spy on us when we're on the phone, when we're on the Net. My point is that I never had a good experience in foster care. Social workers don't take the time and effort to make sure that the foster homes are safe. Criminal record checks are **not sufficient**. People get away with crimes all the time. Criminal record checks **aren't good enough!!!**

We're Always the Problem

By Leo Hébert

I'm going to write about how you fit in when you move into a foster home and how you feel and how they accept you. In my personal experience I felt kind of left out, like I didn't belong there. I felt that the foster parents treated their kids better and gave them more. For example, if something went wrong in the house, the foster parent blamed it on the foster kid because they don't think it could ever be their kid. They always assume the foster child is the problem child, and they hardly ever consequence their own children.

Taken Advantage of & Restricted

By Tayanna

When I was in foster care I was living with a pretty cool family and it was finally normal. But then it was kind of strange. I had a lot of chores and I was like a built in babysitter. It was like because I had a curfew (set by my social worker) she thought "Well, Tayanna's home and she's not going anywhere, so I might as well go out."

On the nights when the kids were already in bed it was OK, but when I was left to put them to bed it seemed like it wasn't fair. At first I was getting paid for it, but the money stopped. That's not the only thing that bothered me. I didn't have heat in my room because she said I put it too high. I was restricted to one glass of milk a day, one glass of juice a day and the cookies and stuff were hidden from me.

Groups Homes vs. Foster Homes

By Tina Doucette

I've lived with Children's Aid for 11 years and I've been in both foster homes and group homes. Most people who live in care would disagree with me when I say I'd rather live in a group home than a foster home.

I lived in my first group home when I was 12 years old. I lived there for like two days and then I went to another.

At the first one I knew people that made me feel comfortable and at the second one I didn't know anyone but the staff and residents still made me feel comfortable. I didn't have any problems my first time in a group home so I liked it. In foster homes, if I've been there for awhile, I start to get agitated and me and the foster family'll start fighting and I get kicked out. Now, in group homes I don't find I get like that where I blow up. When I've left a group home I've moved onto something better. I've never gotten kicked out of a group home. One thing I notice is that **I get more money and more attention from my worker when I live in a group home and I have no clue why that is.**

When I lived in my first foster home I was about six years old and it wasn't too bad because it was my aunt and uncle.

The times I've gone to a group home, I've felt awkward at first, like I shouldn't be there or I don't belong. When I've been there for awhile I start noticing (only at some foster homes) that they treat their kids better than the foster kids and that really bugs me. There are only two real foster homes where I stayed any length of time. The rest were respite which are only for a short time or I don't stay. In group homes, I've never really had to stay any length of time till now, and I find I'm doing a lot better than I would be doing in a foster home.

Right now I live in a group home. I've been there almost two years and I'm not close to leaving yet.

"I prefer a foster home. They're not always coming and going. You build a stronger relationship with them as opposed to staff. It's more comfortable with people you can call your parents." -Stephanie



Call Back!

By Brandon Farmer

They should return your phone calls because you always have something to tell them and you call them and leave a message around 12:00 at lunch. Yes, it's lunch, but they don't get off until 4:30 so that leaves them 4 and a ½ hours to call you back. So that makes me p***ed off.

Show Us You Care!

By Sarah Johnson

I think social workers need a lot of improvement so that their kids know there is somebody out there who cares and will help them. When kids are brought into care, for any reason, they are given a social worker to help them understand their options, find a place to live and give them financial aid. The worker the kids get may not be their worker for as long as they're in care. They could end up having many social workers—changes which could cause the kid to think there is something wrong with them, and which could be very stressful. They would feel unwanted.

Some kids may think that their social worker doesn't care about them. This is because kids rarely get to talk to their workers. **I've talked to my worker's machine more than I've talked to her.** I'm not saying that they should be at our beck and call, but it would be nice to hear back from them. I think this is one of the biggest issues for kids and their workers. For example, if you need permission or money from your worker and you call and leave a message, he/she may not get back to you in time. I know that I would be very angry if I missed a school dance or a sleepover because my worker didn't get back to me in time.

To solve this problem, I think we should know our worker's cell phone number or maybe every two weeks we should meet with our workers and tell them what's coming up so they know ahead of time. This would help us to know that



The inbox is always full.

our worker cares and wants us to have a normal life, because being in care isn't easy.

It's Not Their Fault

By Andrew Nickerson

Social workers have too many youth. Whenever you call your social worker you have to leave a message and they don't get back to you for quite awhile. It is not their fault. They are too busy with all the youth they take care of. If there were more social workers this wouldn't be a problem. We Need More Social Workers!

If there were more workers than each would have fewer youth. Then workers could be more available, return phone calls, give us quicker responses to our needs, and be on time... I also think social workers should be more informative and discuss issues with youth before making decisions. For example, a youth needs a group home but doesn't need to be away from his or her family but the worker sends the youth into a home very far away just because he thinks it's a nice place. He makes this decision without ask-

ing the youth if he would like to live far away. I think in this situation, the worker should call around to lots of homes, find lots of open beds, and tell the youth their choices of where to live.

Ouch!

By Roy White

When I first met my social worker I wasn't that old and she seemed cool to me. Then I moved back to my house and she gave us things. Then, one day I called about some things and I couldn't get them. I don't really talk to her anymore because she doesn't return my calls or give me anything. But when my Mom calls about a problem with me she's always ready to kick me out of my mother's house. It seems she's only there if my mother needs help getting me out. I haven't seen her for awhile and it's better.

I find me and my Mom get along better without her. I think if she had really tried to call me back when I needed her I wouldn't be upset about this. My social worker doesn't even call my therapist, he said, and how is she supposed to know anything about me if she doesn't want to talk to me or him. But I'm still in care and he's still my therapist.

"When I was in care, my social worker had a tattoo. That's about all I know about her. I met her once." —Trevor Dakins

"I was never really fond of my social worker just because I always felt that he was ripping my family apart. Me being rebellious and stubborn was like, you know what? I just don't like you, so that's just pretty much the way I felt." —Misty

Money & Programs



Not Enough \$\$ for Hockey

By John Walker

When I was in care I wanted to play hockey, but there wasn't enough money for equipment. It seemed like I could get the money for registration but not the money for the equipment. I think I could have found used equipment or

something for probably a lot cheaper. One good thing I liked was they funded my soccer and camp every summer that I wanted to go and play, but that's just for the summer, so they should have let me play hockey in the winter.

Give Us a Chance!

By Cyndi Rafuse

Everyone knows money is a big issue for youth in care. I know most youth get clothing cheques and money for personal items like shampoo, razors, deodorant, etc. but we are teens going to schools that are too far away from the house to go home for lunch, and teens with friends who can afford to go to the movies and bowling. It's not fair that youth living in group homes who don't have their own money cannot do that unless a staff member is present. I think we should be able to have a few dollars for lunch, even just five dollars. Instead of always having to bring sandwiches to school, we could go to the cafeteria or out for lunch even just once a week. I get 10\$ a week and as a smoker my 10\$ is gone usually on that day. It's not cool when you want to go to the movies with all your friends and you can't because you're broke! I know I could go out and get



a job but I'm only 15 and I'm struggling with school so I have no time for a job. Not all of us use our money for drugs or alcohol. We should be given a chance!

Some People Use the System

By Kyle Clayton

I personally feel that people outside of care are very judgmental, especially when it comes to money. I've found that CAS is taking every person/child into care for, well, I think very poor reasons. I met this kid in my group home who was 12 years old. I asked him why he was

here. He said, "I got in a fight with my Mom." He clearly stated afterwards that it was an argument as opposed to a fight.

I realized that the people who have a good reason to be here are being robbed by other people who can easily fix these problems, just choose not to. They take what little money/benefits we have and throw it in our face. They actually **use** the system, which also leaves people who need it with nothing, and with a bad reputation. I think every two years they should do a "system clean-out" so all those people who don't have to be there would go back home and people like us (people who need to be in care) can have a little more benefits.

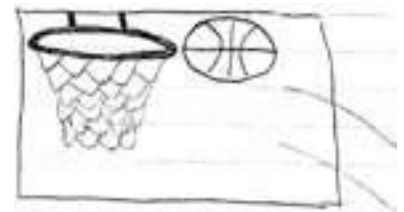
More Programs Needed

By Brandon Farmer

I think CAS should step up a little. For example, when kids are put into group homes or if they go to jail, when they go back to their Mom or foster parents' house, they are going to be the same way. What I am trying to say is they are letting kids off easy. But if they gave them programs to attend, I think that would be the best way to handle kids who need help.

By Cyndi Rafuse

I think there should be all kinds of indoor and outdoor programming because it would stop people from getting into trouble. I think that programming should be optional. You shouldn't have to be forced to go to another group home. And I think we need more athletic programming, like basketball, football and volleyball.



By Candace Zinn

I feel that programs should be optional because when I have things to do I don't want to be forced to do it. I would rather do it on my own time. Another thing is I feel that maybe we should have more social outings and maybe girls separate from boys because us girls need to talk about personal things and so do boys. I figure that we should have a guest speaker who would come in and take the time to talk to us about real life situations such as sex, pregnancy, and also boyfriends, and the life that we have ahead.



The group at one of the first sessions in early October 2004



David Swick, Daily News Writing Editor, led a session on Interviewing Tips.



In April, we met with Associate Chief Justice Ferguson (R) and Justice Moir (L) at the Supreme Court of Nova Scotia — Family Division to discuss our experiences with the courts and the system.

"When you live in someone else's house it's always 'Do it; it's my house.' They use that against you." —Brandon Farmer

"I lived in a foster home where my foster mother had five other kids but all of them were adopted so we all got treated the same, which was really crappy. I got treated better because I was still a foster kid so I still had a social worker who could find out if they hurt me. The messages I got were: 'You're terrible; you don't deserve any of these things' -- I was doing drugs and cutting myself, all because I thought I sucked and I'm not worthy. That was partly because I was in that foster home. Your social worker leaves you in an indecent home. What does that say to you?" —Sanna

"It's scary thinking what some foster parents can get away with. Social workers don't always see what's going on behind closed doors and that really makes me uncomfortable." —Misty

"Some of the foster parents I still keep in touch with. I feel that some of them were in my life because they were very positive and showed a different direction that gave me the knowledge to know that I can make my own destiny, and that it doesn't matter what is happening now or what happened in the past because I can't change that. I can just move on and make my own choices which is really nice." —Misty

"Foster homes take kids away from the pain they had to go through, and give them a break." —Nadine

"Although there is a certain safety and security in foster homes, you do have to worry about them leaving you." —Molly

"My foster parents are there to set me straight. They are the main reason why I have goals." —Molly

"They get mad at you for the weirdest things. They say things about my family that they shouldn't. That makes me mad and sometimes causes an argument." —Nadine

"They favour their birth children more. They do more things with them." —Molly

"I find talks are the best thing to work with. That's what me and my parents do — sit down on the couch and chat. It can last anywhere from five minutes to three hours." —Benjamin

"It's easier to talk to the people because they're focusing on you, not like in a group home where they're focusing on a whole crowd of people." —Kody

Goals

What I'm Doing to Achieve My Goals

By Candace Zinn

1. The main thing I'm doing to help myself with my goals is following through with the rules at my group home because as long as I'm here I can get all the help I need. I know that if I were home with my Mom she wouldn't be able to afford the help.
2. Another thing I'm doing is staying away from drugs and alcohol. I don't need that at this point in my life
3. "Peer pressure" is a major thing that I try to stay away from and it gets even worse as you get older unless you stop it when you're younger, or now. For example, I was doing great in school until I met new friends in Dartmouth and they convinced me there were better things to do than go to school, so **I dropped out in grade seven. It was the worst thing that I could have done in my whole life because it's so hard to go back after being out for so long. I wish that I could encourage all kids of all ages to stay in school.**
4. I'm staying focused on my schoolwork, doing it every day, and I'm being recognized by my staff and even my social worker. It really makes a difference when they tell me how good I'm doing and it makes me want to work even harder.
5. One of my final things I'm doing to make my goals come true is I'm doing extra activities like the Newsletter, which has been a big help because now I have something to do on Tuesdays and I find that it helps me with the whole group home thing because now I know that I'm not alone. It shows me there are a lot of kids who feel the same way as me. Now I find it makes me not so depressed and I'm able to go forward with my goals.
6. A couple of extra activities I'm doing are: reading, volunteering at a daycare, going to start going to the gym, and cleaning. I find that all these things help me follow through with my goals.

By Andrew Nickerson

My goals right now are to quit smoking and to do well in school to achieve my goals. I am buying the patch or gum for smoking this weekend. And for school, I am doing all my homework, going to all my classes, and paying attention.

By Cyndi Rafuse

My goals are to become a probation officer and get out on my own. I am going to school to finish grade 12, trying to find a job and saving money for university/college. I'm taking courses that will prepare myself for becoming a probation officer and going out on my own. I'm also starting to get negative people out of my life.

By Justin Kane

I am doing many things to achieve my goals. One of those things is going to school and bringing up my grades which I am doing right now by going to school every day and making sure my work is done and even taking work home. That is what I am doing to achieve my goals.

By Amanda Sprague

I want to go to SAP (Supervised Apartment Program) for a year and then after that get my own place. What I'm doing to achieve my goals is I'm trying to do all I'm supposed to do at my group home by following all the rules and keeping my appointments. I was going to school until I had too many absences so I'm going to work my butt off in February. Until then, I'm going to try to get a job so I can show everyone that I am responsible and can keep a job or keep a program.

By Sarah Johnson

Life is all about goals. Everybody has at least one goal in life they set out to achieve, but everyone's goals are different. I don't think there is a wrong or right way to achieve your goals as long as you're happy in the end. A goal can be anything from finishing the school year to being an Olympic gold medalist. There is no such thing as a small goal because everyone's standards are different.

I have set many goals in life. Some I have already achieved. My main goal is to write a book along with my sisters. This is going to be the hardest and most time-consuming goal I have ever set, but the reward for completing this goal will be great. To accomplish this goal I have started to write

down many of my life stories, as they come. I will continue to write about my life until it becomes boring. My English teachers at school have even proofread some of the things I wrote and they said I was on the right track. This makes me very happy because achieving this goal is important to me. **I think goals are something that gives people hope for the future. They are the light at the end of a long dark path.**

By Ammy Purcell

To achieve my goals I would have to know what my goals are. As of now, I really don't have any set goals except to get out of high school and to do that all I have to do is stay in school and get good grades.

By Kyle Clayton

Well, first off, what I'm doing to achieve my goals is going to school. That right now is the most successful thing I can do until university where a lot of doors are going to be opened. I know if I can achieve the goal of being a lawyer, then being successful shouldn't be a problem.

By Leo Hebert

At the moment I have some goals but not as many as I would like. One of my goals is getting through high school, and I am doing this by studying and bringing up my average. My other goal is to get prepared for university. I haven't really worked on this, but I will.

By John Walker

I am really only doing the Newsletter right now. I want to get a job in a trade but I've got to finish high school to do that and I need money so I don't have time to go to school. That sucks, because pretty much all my money I've got to give to my Mom because she needs to pay the bills. So I've pretty much got to work to stay here.

By Brandon Farmer

To reach my goal I have to stay in school and get my grade 12 and get a good job so I can make a good salary. I also want to help people and keep people healthy. To reach my goal I've got to keep my friends, and keep myself healthy and help people get jobs. I hope to have a family in the future that will do the same. And that's how I will reach my goal.



Emotions

Happy

By Andrew Nickerson

Happy is a good feeling that you have when something good happens to you. When you are happy you usually feel very good and maybe excited.

Hatred

By Bob Avante

Hatred has to do with being in care. I've been in so many situations where being without parents for nine years has caused me a lot of hatred. I've been in foster homes where they expected me to be somebody else. I hated that. In one foster home, I did all the work that normally the foster parents do. I was basically a slave. I couldn't even hang out with my friends. I absolutely hated it.

Foster parents take us kids for granted. The public has to realize that the youth that comes into care usually comes from environments that are very hazardous. My parents weren't the best, that's why I'm here. Stop the stereotype and just look around and open your eyes a bit, listen to what's going on. **We work so hard just to be! But we're never who we are.**

Loved

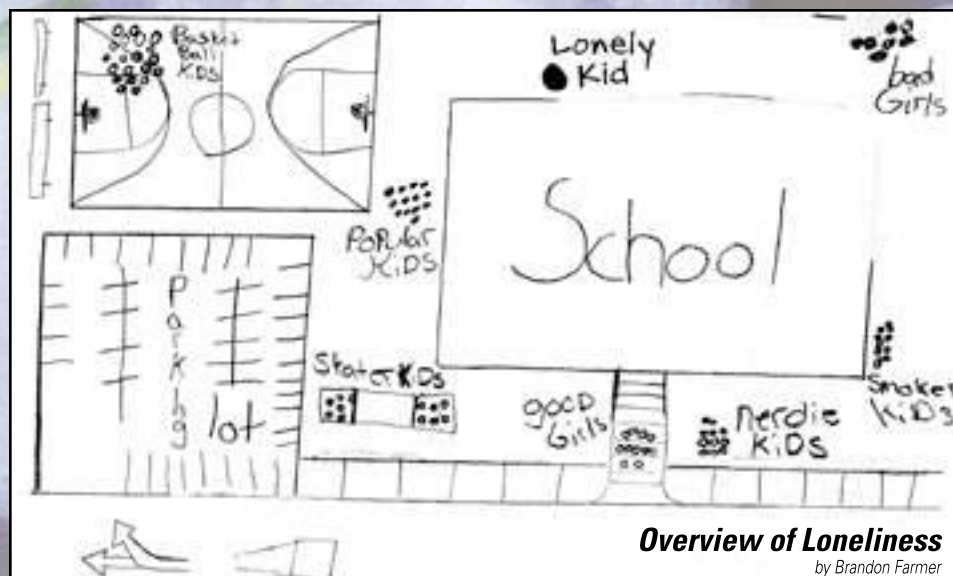
By Ammy Purcell

To me, feeling loved is the best feeling ever. To know that someone feels so much for you is so great, but to feel that for someone who doesn't really feel the same can really hurt. But sometimes love (in all its greatness) can bring on the feelings of indignation. But no matter what emotion you experience, it will always bring on another.

Lonesome

By Tina Doucette

When I feel lonesome, I'm usually never alone but I feel alone. There's always staff or a resident around me but inside I feel alone. Maybe because no one went through what I went through, so inside, I feel alone. Everyone around me is happy and having fun and I sit and feel empty and alone.



Overview of Loneliness

by Brandon Farmer

COLOURS

Red

By Kyle Clayton

The reason I like the colour red is because growing up I was attached to this colour because when I was upset I would close my eyes and look at the sun. Red just seems to calm me down, and it's the colour of fire. Fire also calms me down. It is said that the reason why casinos are usually red, is because the colour "red" supposedly makes you lose track of time. You waste more money. It has always symbolized royalty and has been a very powerful symbol in today's society. I also like the flavours that usually come along with the colour red. It is

related to yin and yang; it represents both good and bad in one symbol.

Blue

by Leo Hébert

When I see this colour it is one of the nicest colours and pleasing to the eye. I see blue as a royalty colour, or important. It also inflicts grace. For instance, peacocks are one of the nicest birds to look at and the blue in the array of colours mixed in with the blue in the bird seems better than everything around it. The royal colours always were blue or purple. It

kind of has an authority colour but with kindness and everything good mixed in with it. You can never go wrong with blue. It mixes and fits well with anything. It also takes colours and makes them nicer to look at.

Pink

By Tony Beaumier

Pink is my favourite colour because most people think it's gay, so I wear it to see if they call me gay. I wear it downtown 'cause the ladies love it, and I like how it's a lighter red, and red is my second favourite colour.



Alex Macintosh, 15



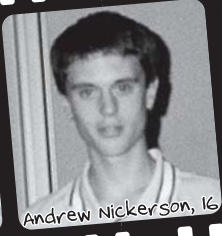
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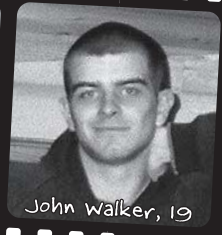
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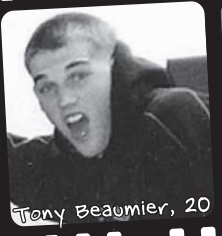
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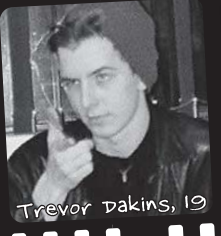
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