

Children in the State System

A few months ago, I had a brief conversation with a social worker concerning children caught up in the State ‘care’ system, the Rotherham *et al* rape gangs, the respective roles of Social Services and parents, and various other aspects of the State’s assistance (at least, as the State sees it) of families in recent decades. Because our chat was necessarily very brief, I subsequently revisited in a little more depth some of topics we’d touched upon, collating them into a letter to the social worker concerned, of which this short document is just one part.

Social Worker: “It’s about keeping children safe.”

Elizabeth: “The State has the worst possible outcomes for keeping children ‘safe’ in all areas – physically, emotionally, educationally, sexually, life-chances... And while there are certainly some excellent foster carers, there also some very dangerous ones: we all know the details of the abuse and murder of little Elsie by Scully-Hicks...” [My apologies – Scully-Hicks was an adoptive parent, not a foster carer.]

“Applications to take children into care have risen steadily since the 1990s, with 14,207 made in the year ending in March [2018], up from 11,159 in 2015. There have also been rises in cases in Wales” [Social Workers Break Up Too Many Families, Review by Family Law Group Says].

“[W]hen a child is placed in to the care of a local council, the council takes on what is known as parental responsibility ... the council takes on the obligations usually borne by parents” [Rotherham – the Perfect Storm].

“Care homes are supposed to replace a failed family home – a staff member is by definition a care-giver, in essence, a substitute parent, there to provide love, attention, understanding and guidance ... The home should be a place of safe refuge, where staff are able to supply plenty of empathy, love and patience” [Unthinkable, pp.168-9].

“If the state takes a child into care, it has a duty to provide better protection than the parents did” [How We Fail Children in Care].

It certainly does. Not least because the State is arrogating to itself the role of the parent on the basis that parents cannot be trusted to “keep their children safe” while the State claims it can. But this grab for moral superiority can be shown for the chimera that it really is – for, as so much evidence for the experiences of children while in State ‘care’ shows, that is rarely the reality for the children concerned...

(A) Stability, Experiences, Outcomes

“It is well established that these children are more likely to have poor educational experiences, leave school with fewer qualifications, are at higher risk of offending, becoming a teenage parent and being not in education, employment or training” [Barnardos: What We Do].

Stability

“Most children in care experience some kind of instability in one form or another throughout the course of a year. Only 1 in 4 children in care experienced no placement move, no school move and no social worker change within a year ... Stability can be the difference between children flourishing in their environment, or having the difficulties they have already had to endure further compounded ... Children regularly speak to the Children’s Commissioner about why stability is important for them ... who are facing significant upheaval ... **without being consulted, knowing why, or wanting it**” [Stability Index 2018: Overview and Findings, pp.4,6. (my emphasis)].

“This year’s Stability Index [for the financial years 2015/16 and 2016/17] ... reveals, for the second year running, that thousands of children are still ‘pinging’ around the system ... Stability is important for any child, and unwanted moves or school changes and the disruption they bring can be particularly difficult for children in care. Stable relationships and a secure environment provide a sense of belonging and identity. Where there is

instability relationships with trusted adults and other children suffer, succeeding at school becomes more difficult and vulnerability increases, leading some children to fall through the gaps and others open to exclusion, exploitation and abuse. ... Every day I hear from ‘pinball kids’ who are being pinged around the care system when all they really want is to be settled and to get on with normal life. These children need stability, yet far too many are living unstable lives, in particular children entering care in their early teens” [*Pinball Kids Pinging Around the Care System*].

Health and Wellbeing Assessments

“Local authorities have a duty to promote and ensure the wellbeing of all children who are looked after by them ... Health Assessments should cover a range of issues beyond those of physical health which include developmental health and emotional well-being” [*Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England*, pp.117-118].

Emotional, Mental, and Behavioural Wellbeing

“Evidence suggests that looked after children are nearly 5 times more likely to have a mental health disorder than all children” [*Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England*, Appendix 3, p.121].

“Of the 38,010 children aged 5 to 16 years, who were looked after at 31 March 2017 for at least 12 months, 28,810 (76%) had a SDQ score reported ... Almost half (49%) ... had ‘normal’ emotional and behavioural health, 12% had ‘borderline’ scores and 38% had scores which were a cause for concern” [*Children Looked After in England ... Year Ending 31 March 2017: Additional Tables*, p.14].

“Looked after children are approximately four times more likely to have a mental disorder than children living in their birth families ... some young people had ... suffered from a lack of attention to their emotional needs. In the worst cases, young people had been let down by a system that did not recognize their behaviour as a sign of distress and failed to provide them with support to develop secure attachments to their carers ... Above all, children and young people need consistent relationships with adults who are committed to loving and caring for them” [*Achieving Emotional Wellbeing for Looked After Children*, pp.5-6].

“Research over the last decade provides compelling evidence that looked after children are at greater risk of experiencing poor mental health than children in the general population ... Looked after children are just over three times more likely to have a disorder than disadvantaged children [*children whose parents had never worked or worked in unskilled occupations*] and over five times more likely to have a diagnosed mental disorder than non-disadvantaged children [*children whose parents had other types of occupation*]. The high rate of behavioural disorders among looked after children is particularly striking, with almost two out of every five children having some kind of diagnosed behavioural disorder” [*Achieving Emotional Wellbeing for Looked After Children*, p.12].

“The Office of National Statistics conducted research on the mental health of young people, aged 5-17, looked after by local authorities. Children in care are 4 times more likely than their peers to have a mental health difficulty ... This included: clinically significant conduct disorders; emotional disorders (anxiety and depression); hyperactivity and less common disorders (pervasive developmental disorders, tics and eating disorders). This compares to a rate of 10% for children aged 5-16 living in private households in Great Britain” [*Children in Care: Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health*].

“A high proportion of looked after children in England and Wales have mental health problems that require professional support – between 25% and 72% of children, according to key pieces of research. However, looked after children’s mental health needs are frequently unmet, which increases children’s risk of a variety of poor outcomes” [*Achieving Emotional Wellbeing for Looked After Children*, p.9].

Poor Mental Health and Educational Achievement: “[Studies found that] children with higher incidence of emotional and behavioural difficulties also demonstrated poor progress with their education and were expected to leave school without qualifications ... more likely to have behavioural problems at school, to truant and to be excluded from school” [*Achieving Emotional Wellbeing for Looked After Children*, p.16].

Poor Mental Health and Homelessness / Poor Employment: “A study of care-leavers’ outcomes found that those who left care with poor mental health were at greater risk of experiencing homelessness and were twice as likely to have poor employment outcomes” [*Achieving Emotional Wellbeing for Looked After Children*, p.16].

Educational Achievements

“This year’s Stability Index ... shows just how disruptive changing school can be: around 4,300 children in care moved school in the middle of the year, and their new school was 24 miles away on average ... around 400 children who moved school ended up missing a whole term as a result ... the system has given up on the hundreds of children bouncing around from one poor school to another. I want all local authorities to make reducing instability a priority and to measure it. I would also like to see Ofsted assessing the stability of children in care as part of their inspections” [*Pinball Kids Pinging Around the Care System*].

Key Stage 1 (2017): “In 2017, 51% of looked after children reached the expected standard in reading, 39% in writing, 46% in mathematics and 60% in science ... Compared to non-looked after children [76% reading, 68% writing, 75% mathematics, 83% science]” [*Outcomes for Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England*, p.5].

Key Stage 2 (2017): “[I]n 2017, 32% of looked after children reached the expected standard in the headline measure reading, writing and mathematics, which is much lower than the 61% for non-looked after children” [*Outcomes for Children Looked After*, pp.1,7-8].

Key Stage 4 (2017): “The average Attainment 8 score for looked after children is 19.3 compared to 44.5 for non-looked after children” [*Outcomes for Children Looked After*, p.11].

“[O]nly 9% [of care-leavers] reach university, against a national average of 47%” [*David Cameron Has No Clue*].

“When you consider that our residents have attended compulsory primary and secondary schools for 11 years, the level of education that most of them have reached is literally scandalous ... Some of [them] can barely read their own names, and a lot of them are unable to multiply anything more complicated than the ten times table (some can’t even do that)” [*Generation F*, p.85].

Substance Misuse

“Evidence suggests that children in care are four times more likely than their peers to smoke, use alcohol and misuse drugs” [*Children Looked After by Local Authorities in England*, Appendix 2, p.118].

Criminal Reprimands and Convictions

“In the year ending 31 March 2017, 4% of children aged 10 years or over (1,580 children) who were looked after for at least 12 months were convicted or subject to a final warning or reprimand during the year ... Looked after children (who have been looked after for at least 12 months) are five times more likely to offend than all children; the latest available figures for all children are for the year ending 31 March 2016” [*Children Looked After in England ... Year Ending 31 March 2017: Additional Tables*, p11].

“I tried to improve the situation for children in care through the measures in the ‘Care Matters’ White Paper. We were driven by a host of depressing statistics, but the most scandalous was that children in care accounted for half a percent of the child population but as adults accounted for 27% of the prison population” [Alan Johnson, MP, *HofC Hansard Debates for 07 Jan 2016*].

“Around 10% of children aged 10 and over who have been in care have been cautioned or convicted of an offence, [3x] the rate for all children of the same age” [*Children Brought Up in Care Have Far Poorer Life Prospects*].

“[One 15-year-old girl in the care home in which I’m working] is a violent young offender devoid of manners or respect for others, traits in which she is indulged, and even steeped, by the care system” [*Generation F*, p.78].

Teenage Pregnancy

“Children taken into care are two and a half times more likely to become teenage parents and 66 times more likely to have their own children taken into care ... at least one in seven young women leaving the care system is pregnant or already a mother” [*Children Brought Up in Care Have Far Poorer Life Prospects*].

Prostitution

“Two separate research studies estimate that more than 70% of adult street prostitutes were once in the care of social services” [NSPCC ‘Street Matters’, and The Poppy Project, referenced in: *Unthinkable*, p.161].

Homelessness

“Between a quarter and a third of people sleeping rough had been in care” [*Children Brought Up in Care Have Far Poorer Life Prospects*].

“Serious case reviews have told us time and again that teenagers are a high-risk group but all too often, all through society, and most ashamedly amongst professionals, they are seen as resilient and better equipped to cope with stress than younger children. This meant that in some cases suicidal teenagers were left alone in B&Bs or even sleeping on the streets while they waited for the assessment that was supposed to set them on the road to a safe future” [*Unthinkable*, pp.40-41].

(B) Abuse of Children in the State System

“Articles 19 and 20 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child emphasise the rights of all children to protection from abuse or exploitation, with **special protection to be afforded to those children who have to be looked after away from home**” [*Keeping Children Safe, 2009-2012*, p.136, (My emphasis)].

Before I begin this sub-section, please understand that I am by no means unaware that there are also abuses of children by their parents or other family members. Victoria Climbié and Baby ‘P’ are well-known but there are many others too. I am *not* dismissing or down-playing any of these parental or familial abuses. The issue here, though, is the claim by the State to be *better* at looking after children than parents are.

Presumably you are aware of at least *some* of the abuses of children living in State residential homes or in foster/adoptive homes? Many of which children may well have been a lot safer if the State hadn’t interfered and taken them away from their families? On the following pages are highlighted (if that’s not an irony) just a few examples:

(I) State Run/Approved Care Homes

“Every residential children’s home must provide the levels of love, care, nurture, stability, discipline and opportunity that we would expect from good parents ... The state removes [children] from their homes with the expectation that it will do a better job than the one the child experiences at the parents’ hands” [*How We Fail Children in Care*].

Keeping Children Safe: Children in Care 2009-2012 (2014)

“Concerns about abuse in foster and residential care have been expressed, intermittently, for over 70 years ... there is growing concern about whether the nature of modern residential provision puts young people at risk of poor quality care or harm” [pp.19,26].

“Information on allegations in residential settings was sought for the ... three-year period (2009-2012) ... we estimate there are likely to be around 250-300 confirmed cases of abuse or neglect in residential care [by residential staff] across the UK each year ... this is likely to underestimate the true extent of the problem and takes no account of abuse by peers or adults external to the placement ... The subject of the allegation was generally a residential social worker ... male (15) rather than female (5)” [pp.14-15,114].

“Very few young people were removed from placement [*Why? The same child would be snatched away before you could say ‘Call the social worker!’ if the abuser were a biological parent*], and looked after children reviews to assess care planning needs were rarely held [*Why not? Social Services meetings would be held by the dozen if the abuser were the child’s biological parent*]. In most respects, therefore, life went on much as before. Outcomes for staff were much more variable: while some were subject to no further action [*how often is that the case for a biological parent?*], others had their employment terminated” [p.16].

Neglect and Emotional Abuse

“The [parliamentary] debate [October 2012] highlighted again that the approximately 65,000 children in care very often do not receive [the] support and attention they need to overcome the trauma of abuse and neglect in their early years that led to [them] being taken into care” [*We Need to Protect Children in Care*].

“Sarah, a young person who has been involved with our work, explained what she saw in care and what young people need ... Sarah said she sees care staff as merely making sure that young people eat and are clean ... she said: ‘The main thing for a child in care is, like, they need love and attention, that is what kids in care need’.” [*We Need to Protect Children in Care*].

“Children in care lack love and attention. The situation is particularly bleak for teenagers who, after multiple placements, wind up in a children’s home far from their local area, away from their friends and family. Nearly half of the 4840 children who live in children’s homes live outside their local authority. Some 29% of children in children’s homes have had at least five previous placements” [*We Need to Protect Children in Care*].

Bullying and Physical Abuse

“Several studies have also found evidence of widespread bullying in residential care, often persisting over long periods ... In one study of 48 children’s homes 40% of the young people reported being bullied by other residents. A recent study of 27 children’s homes found that nearly half of a small group of residents whose placements had disrupted had been obliged to leave because they had violently assaulted other residents or staff” [*Keeping Children Safe*, p.25].

“Over one-half of cases concerning residential staff were categorised as either physical abuse or use of excessive physical restraint ... [including] a male security staff member and a female teaching assistant, each of whom were found to have physically abused a young resident at their respective secure and residential educational establishments” [*Keeping Children Safe*, pp.16,114].

Sexual Abuse

... by residential staff, other children/residents, registered sex offenders placed in the locality of the care home, grooming/rape-gangs, politicians and celebrities and various other fine pillars of the community...

“Although children are being sexually exploited when living in a range of circumstances, children in care account for a disproportionate number of children known to be sexually exploited. Research statistics suggest that anywhere from 20 to 35% of sexually exploited children are in care” [NSPCC, *Children in Care: Statistics*].

“[F]rom minor indiscretions ... to the prolonged sexual and emotional abuse of children ... strong selection and assessment procedures are also needed to prevent individuals who may present serious harm to children becoming residential workers or foster carers” [*Keeping Children Safe*, p.18].

“[P]lacement in residential care may expose young people to being abused by other residents ... Some of those [in our study] who had reported sexual abuse by peers complained that this was not taken seriously, because staff sometimes viewed this as consensual sexual activity” [*Keeping Children Safe*, p.25].

“Currently, sexual abuse by adults external to the placements appears to be the greatest concern. Children’s homes are typically open environments nowadays, but this can make it harder to protect residents from abusive adults outside them. In the context of the current safeguarding measures, it is possible that predatory men might now seek access to children in other ways than through employment in a children’s home. Although vulnerable young people who are not looked after are also sexually exploited, some young people in children’s homes may be exposed to this by virtue of being in residential care, because their placement makes them an identifiable target and exposes them to coercion by peers” [*Keeping Children Safe*, pp.25-26].

“There is evidence that children’s homes are being clustered in unsafe localities, some with high numbers of registered sex offenders ... Rather than consider whether the home and the locality within which it sits are appropriate, some commissioners are driven primarily by cost, with some requiring an 80/20 split in favour of cost over quality. ... this amounts to a worryingly inadequate situation and exacerbates the vulnerability of children who are already psychologically fragile and therefore easily preyed on by those who seek to exploit them” [*How We Fail Children in Care*].

“The protection of children in care from [sexual] exploitation raises a number of issues about the care system ... Given the nature of turnover of placements in residential units, there is a constant flow of vulnerable children for perpetrators to exploit. As a result, some services have reported having worked with the same residential unit over a number of years, as different children arrive and leave the unit over that time period” [CSE in Gangs and Groups, quoted in: *Rotherham – the Perfect Storm*].

“The complete lack of coherent and effective policies and practices by local authorities in confronting and preventing the sexual abuse of children in care are apparent ... most local authorities are unaware of how many children in their care are being sexually abused” [Rotherham – the Perfect Storm].

“From the mid-1990s there were concerns about children’s homes being targeted for the purposes of CSE ... some local [Rotherham] residential units were overwhelmed by the problem of CSE. Children who were exploited before they became looked after continued to be exploited, and were often at even greater risk of harm. Other children became exposed to sexual exploitation for the first time whilst they were looked after in children’s homes ... There was no appropriate management response to the problem” [Jay Report, p.53].

“It has already been well documented ... that once predatory gangs know the location of children’s care homes, they target them hoping to snare victims” [Unthinkable, p.ix].

“The University of Bedfordshire has researched runaways from care and found that over 50% of all young people using child sexual exploitation services on one day in 2011 were known to have gone missing (25% over ten times), and 22% were in care. The number of children in the UK in care who have been sexually exploited is about 21% ... The researchers had ‘been informed about children’s homes being targeted by perpetrators of child sexual exploitation, with multiple children across extended periods of time being groomed and abused by the same perpetrators ... These children are particularly vulnerable because they often feel unloved, and frankly they are often unloved, so they are very susceptible to being groomed by men who tell them how much they love them, and give them gifts’ [Unthinkable, p.168].

“Some staff, not trained in sexual exploitation, exhibit less than desirable attitudes to the children in their care. An inquiry into the attitudes of care home staff found that some professionals saw the children in their care as ‘troublesome’, ‘promiscuous’, ‘criminals’ or ‘slags who knew what they were getting themselves into’ and had made an active choice to have sex with older men, and that this was acceptable, even when they were under sixteen. This attitude has become institutionalised” [Unthinkable, pp.169-170].

“[T]his attitude is not restricted to care home staff. Some social workers and police officers often view children who run away repeatedly as ‘streetwise’ and therefore require less attention, when the opposite is true. One young person’s social worker said: Well, if she won’t stay in then that’s what will happen to her.’ Thanks to these attitudes, signs of continuing or new abuse and exploitation go undetected – causing more damage to children already on the edge, helping their abusers to get exactly what they want” [Unthinkable, p.170].

“So vulnerable children are being sent hundreds of miles away from home and are deposited in houses from which they feel compelled to run away, only to escape into streets filled with sex offenders. It seems as though some privately run care homes are unintentionally providing perverts with a constant supply of vulnerable children. Hardly a world safer than the one these children have left” [Unthinkable, p.165].

“Nikki had been pimped by her own mother. Sandra had been groomed, had lied to her foster parents and lied about her father raping her. Janine, her body vandalised, had been raped by bikers. Gloria, a crack addict, had sold her body for her fix. Considered too vulnerable, their problems too difficult to overcome, they had been sent away, somewhere safe, away from their problems, for their own protection. Except it had been anything but. These children had ended up suffering more than if they’d remained [where they were] and had been left traumatised beyond most people’s reckoning. What was the point of handing them over to care homes only for them to run away and then be raped countless times? How on earth could this be allowed to happen?” [Unthinkable, p.162].

“It seems as though a sexual predator has designed the current childcare system – because at the moment sexual predators are more likely to benefit from it than the children it is supposed to protect ... the current system is perfectly assembled to send children primed for sexual exploitation into the arms of sexual predators ... the system has been trafficking the UK’s most vulnerable children [Unthinkable, p.173].

“[In Rotherham] ... As far back as 1996, a social services investigation found that girls were being coerced into ‘child prostitution’ by a small group of men who regularly collected them from residential care homes. Up to

seventy girls were said to be involved ... Despite repeated reports handed over to police and social services from Risky Business, nothing was done” [Unthinkable, pp.242-3].

“[M]y social workers found me a place at a local children’s home ... I had all the freedom I wanted. For a girl in my situation, this was lethal. The place was full of troubled children like me and some of the boys knew a dealer who gave them weed, so we’d sneak off to smoke together all the time. The staff treated us all with utter contempt and didn’t bat an eyelid if my phone rang and I disappeared in the early evening and stayed out all night or even for a few days. Often, my abusers would send me back to the home in a taxi and the staff would even pay the fare, using money from the petty cash fund. They hadn’t made it harder for these disgusting paedophiles to reach me; they had made it much, much easier ... I could come go completely as I pleased. Of course, at the time I thought this was great, but now I’m dumbfounded by the complacency of everyone whose job it was to protect me. One of the keyworkers, Rita, was even worse than [my social workers] ... she used to look at me as if I was a piece of s*** she’d dragged in on her shoe” [Violated, pp.128-9].

“Sometimes the men who’d abused me would drive me back to the home themselves, parking right outside, bold as brass ... these men would demand that I paid them a fare ... I didn’t have any money of my own, so I’d walk into the home, where Rita would usually be sitting behind her desk, and get her to sort it out ... she’d walk outside, open the taxi door and look straight at a man who’d most likely had sex with me the night before – the vulnerable, drugged-up fifteen-year-old girl she was supposed to be looking after. She never scribbled down the registration number, or made a note of the licence plate or the company the car was from. She certainly didn’t phone the coppers and describe the driver, or what she suspected he’d done to me. All she’d do was ask him to give her a receipt, worried only that she’d get a b***** if the petty cash was a few quid down” [Violated, pp.150-2].

“[C]hildren – in this country – come cheap ... they’re getting trafficked out of care homes and the care system. They’re there for another reason; they’re there to be cared for, apparently. And all of the funds for that are extracted from everybody in terms of taxation, so for the people who abuse them, it’s a *free resource*. And it’s not just about sexual depravity, and it’s not just about torturing a child – although it is about both of these. It seems to be about actually generating a means of exchange and a means of control that is the underlying corruption in this country” [Scotland’s Secret Shame].

Deaths and Suicides

“[A] DCSF [now DforE] report shows that children placed in care are three times more likely to die than others ... where does this leave children in need of protection who are then placed in care and should be safe from harm and neglect?” [Baby P and the Death Toll Keeps Rising].

“David Cameron ... noted that the suicide rate among children formerly in care was four times the national average” [David Cameron Has No Clue].

“In Leicester recently, a jury was shown a 93-minute police video of a 14-year-old boy describing how, after being taken by social workers into care, he was for three years subjected by a care worker to sexual abuse so horrendous that he repeatedly pleaded for help from other members of staff. His pleas were ignored ... the boy hanged himself with a curtain cord” [What Our Judges Forget When They Send Children into Care].

“2003: Papers report that Victoria ‘Vicky’ Agoglia, fifteen, a white girl who absconded from her privately run Rochdale children’s home twenty-one times in two months, died of a heroin overdose after being used for sex by older men who paid her in alcohol, coke and heroin. Vicky, who had ambitions of becoming a model, had previously reported being raped. She was in the care of Manchester Social Services, who had placed her in a care home run by a company called Green Corns” [Unthinkable, p.156].

“11-year-old care child Gareth Myatt died as a result of pindown-style abuse in 2004” [Pindown – UK Children’s Homes].

Historic Cases of Institutional Abuse (1940s – 2000s)

I haven’t included here details of historic (i.e. prior to the several acts and initiatives introduced in the 2000s) State-facilitated abuses of children in its ‘care’ homes, but, as you will no doubt know better than I, there is much information on the physical, sexual, and emotional abuse, as well as neglect, and deaths and suicides

(at least 12 resulting from Beechwood, and another 12 from Clwyd), of children while housed in State-owned, State-run, or State-approved institutions during past decades, such as in the following few examples:

- The physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children in the Beechwood group of homes in Nottinghamshire between the 1940s and 2000s, as investigated in Operations Daybreak and Xeres [see Source Refs];
- The emotional, physical, sexual abuse, and neglect of children in St Leonards' Children's Home in Essex in the 1960s-70s, leading to the deaths of some of the children, investigated in Operation Mapperton [see Source Refs];
- The method of 'behaviour management' known as 'Pindown' used in institutions in Staffordshire during the 1970s and 1980s, as detailed in the Report *The Pindown Experience and the Protection of Children* (1991), (also in Kendal House run by the CofE in Kent during the 1970s and 1990s) [see Source Refs];
- The abuse of 750 children in 40+ children's homes in Clywd, North Wales, as described in *Lost in Care - The Waterhouse Report* (2000) [see Source Refs];
- The sexual abuse of boys at Ystrad Hall in Denbighshire, in the 1970s, by the deputy principal [see Source Refs];
- The scandal of Elm Guest House in SW London in the 1970s and 1980s, to which boys from Grafton Close Children's Home were trafficked to be sexually abused by paedophile VIPs [see Source Refs];
- The thousands of children abused in 140+ children's homes, schools, penal institutions (both State and Private) in Scotland, as currently being investigated by the Scottish Child Abuse Inquiry [see Source Refs];
- See also the paper, *Missing Years of Abuse in Children's Homes* (February 2006), reproduced on the webpage No2Abuse, under the title, *Excellent History on Abuse in the Care System*, for a discussion of these and other institutional abuses from the 1960s through the 1980s.

(II) Foster and Adoptive Care

A caveat before I start this section: As I said, there are some – many - excellent foster carers. My parents fostered for a while when I and my siblings were children, and my brother and sister-in-law have been foster carers for many years and have also adopted two children. Both my parents were, and my brother and sister-in-law are, loving and exemplary foster/adoptive parents. There are numerous other foster/adoptive parents like them. In May 2018, for example, the Children's Commissioner undertook a study of 100 children living in foster care:

“Children were asked to talk about their views and experiences of living in foster care ... The majority of children said the best thing ... [was] feeling like ‘part of the family’. Some children said they viewed their foster carers as ‘their mum and dad’, and the foster carers’ children as their brothers and sisters ... having a safe, permanent home ... they liked where they lived, and felt that their carers’ house was their true ‘home’” [*Voices of Children in Foster Care*, pp.4-5].

But tragically there are also foster carers and adoptive parents who are very far from being ‘better’ carers than the children's own biological parents.

“[W]e estimate that there are likely to be 450-550 confirmed cases of abuse or neglect in foster care across the UK each year ... All forms of maltreatment were evident [in our review], including physical abuse (in 37% of cases), emotional abuse (30%), sexual abuse (11%) and neglect (17%) ... 15 cases were reported to concern poor standards of care falling sort [sic] of actual abuse. Many of the foster carers involved in substantiated cases (43%) had been the subject of previous allegations ... Some children ... only disclosed persistent sexual and/or emotional abuse after they had left the placement ... in a small number of very serious cases involving the persistent neglect, emotional and/or sexual abuse of children, it was clear that the foster carers concerned should never have been recruited ... It is important to bear in mind that [our] figures refer only to abuse or neglect that is detected and investigated (that is, recorded abuse or neglect), so the true extent of the problem may be somewhat greater” [*Keeping Children Safe*, pp.11-13,62].

Exacerbating abuse in foster/adoptive care can be the following issues...

“The Edinburgh Inquiry [1999] warned of the danger of over-optimism about the quality of care provided by foster carers who are well known to social workers. This warning was later borne out by the Reading Serious Case Review [2011] into the physical abuse of a baby, which suggested that the fact that the foster carers concerned were well known to local social workers hindered the objective assessment of their strengths and

weaknesses, despite the fact that these carers had repeatedly failed to report a number of minor injuries to previous foster children” [Keeping Children Safe, p.27].

“The Utting report [1997] on safeguards for children living away from home warned that there had been a number of cases ‘where carers had won considerable confidence and respect but where this has marked abuse’” [Keeping Children Safe, p.27].

Further, inherent within the UK Social Services (though not always recognised as such by personnel on the front lines) is a number of ideologies. One is the ideology of Identity Politics. This is the notion of a ‘hierarchy of favoured groups’ in society. What that means is that, from the perspective of the Social Services, though children are of *more* relative importance than their parents because they are higher up the ‘scale’ than their parents, they are of *less* relative importance than other groups who rate *above* children (Social Services’ claims to the contrary notwithstanding) in the hierarchy.

“The Wakefield Inquiry [2007] revealed that professionals avoided facing up to the implications of the concerns raised about the behaviour of two foster carers, in this case partly due to fear of stigmatising gay [sic] carers and partly because they were intimidated by them. Both the Wakefield Inquiry and the Reading Serious Case Review highlighted serious professional and systemic failures that allowed the abuse to continue” [Keeping Children Safe, p.27].

Little seems to have changed in that regard. The situation described above has now been played out again – resulting in the death of the child concerned... Elsie (real name Shayla O’Brien) would still be alive and living with her Grandmother now if Social Services hadn’t put their blind adherence to the ideology of Identity Politics before the safety of that precious little girl and the love of her biological family for her.

But maybe it’s just a case of one or two bad apples?... Sadly, not so. Here are some others:

“18 policemen arrived early one morning at a well-ordered family home, which they reduced to chaos. They arrested and removed the husband and wife in front of their screaming seven-year-old daughter, leaving the little girl to be taken away by social workers ... the social workers produced in court the most extraordinary trumped up charges to justify what they had done ... a senior judge ordered the little girl to be sent for adoption. Only recently has it emerged that, now she is 16, she has been able to escape to be re-united with her parents, and that while in adoption she was seriously abused and emotionally damaged” [Corrupt Practices Disguised as Child Welfare Campaigns].

Keeping Children Safe: Children in Care 2009-2012 (2014)

“Interviews with fostered children and their carers in a recent English study ... revealed that several had been maltreated by previous foster carers. For most of these 10 children the abuse or neglect had been serious, including practices such as keeping a disabled child locked in her bedroom, forcing a child to have cold showers and then stand shivering in the garden, hitting children, forcing them to sleep on the floor in filthy conditions, beating them and denying them food ... no child should experience abuse or neglect in a foster placement and the consequences for children can be very damaging” [Keeping Children Safe, pp.11,30,62].

“Just over one-third of substantiated allegations involved physical abuse or restraint (37%); 30% involved emotional abuse; one in nine sexual abuse (11%); 17% neglect, and 15 cases were reported to involve ‘poor standards of care’ falling short of actual abuse ... Many of these foster carers (43%) had been the subject of earlier allegations, perhaps a signal of future difficulties, whereas past allegations by children were less common. Most carers had been fostering for some considerable time” [Keeping Children Safe, p.89].

Neglect

“[O]ne child’s school had alerted social workers to the fact that the child’s hygiene was poor, that she came to school in ill-fitting and dirty clothes and had an untreated skin condition” [Keeping Children Safe, p.93].

Bullying and Physical Abuse

The baby of a young mother was recently seized by the social services and put into foster care: “Three times recently, in the weekly ‘contacts’ with the baby which the mother and grandmother are allowed in the social

services office, they have been horrified to see their formerly healthy, cheerful child covered in bruises (legs, thighs, knees, shins, forehead and arms) of which they have pictures. The social workers refuse to explain how such injuries could have arisen” [*Child Protection’ Wreaks Havoc on a Loving Family Once Again*].

Verbal and Emotional Abuse

“Emotional abuse was reported for just under one-third of the children [in this study] and had often persisted for long periods of time ... Sometimes the true extent of the emotional abuse was not discovered until after children had left the placement” [*Keeping Children Safe*, p.92].

“I am deeply suspicious of do-gooders. Their virtue-signalling puts them beyond criticism. Some years ago I knew someone who had spent years as a foster carer. Everyone thought this was wonderful and selfless and she basked in the praise. However, on closer examination I realised an astonishing thing: she actually disliked the children in her care. Shouting and screaming abuse at the poor unfortunates, who had had a rough start in life already. Of course, all was sweetness when anybody from the fostering service was around. And would they believe the children anyway if they complained? [Reader’s comment at: *The Footsteps of Moses*].

Sexual Abuse

“A foster father who abused five children over 11 years has been jailed ... ‘he denied any wrongdoing, claiming the children had made up the allegations, even though their stories were consistent ... they will undoubtedly carry the emotional scars of his abuse for the rest of their lives, yet they showed tremendous courage in giving evidence against him” [*Former Foster Carer Raped and Sexually Abused Five Children*].

“Two cases involved historic sexual abuse of female foster children by a foster carer’s ex-partner and by a neighbour ... In some cases ... the sexual or emotional abuse of children, had persisted for years without being detected ... Several cases of sexual abuse, often taking place over a lengthy period of time, involved the adult birth sons, ex-partners or neighbours of foster carers ... it was fairly common [in this study to find that] allegations concerning sexual abuse [were] only made some time after the child had left the placement ... In all but one case ... [the sexual abuse] was extremely serious” [*Keeping Children Safe*, pp.77,105,89,90,97].

“In one case a girl alleged that her foster carer’s former partner had formed an exploitative relationship with her, plying her with drugs and sexually abusing her during and after her time in the placement ... In another case the male foster carer was described as ‘a predatory paedophile’ who had sexually abused his foster daughter Marian, female relatives and others over many years. In this case and some others, the long-term sexual abuse of a fostered child only came to light after investigations into the abuse of others in the household, such as the birth children, adopted children or other relatives of the foster carers” [*Keeping Children Safe*, p.97].

“M had a termination [sic] at the age of 14 and was pregnant again at 15. She was removed from her parents to protect her and yet was allowed by her foster carer to continue the relationship with the perpetrator, even permitting him to accompany her on holiday ... Removing her from her family did not afford her better protection and in fact enabled the perpetrator greater access” [*The Casey Report*, (Feb 2015), p.58].

Pornography

“In three ... cases [in this study], foster carers were found either to have downloaded pornography or ‘looked after’ a computer containing child pornography images for a friend. These cases raised anxieties [!] about the carers’ understanding of child protection. One of these carers had his approval terminated” [*Keeping Children Safe*, p.98].

Alcohol Misuse

“In eight of the 15 cases [in this study] in which poor standards of care were reported, concerns centred on excessive alcohol use by foster carers. Several social workers mentioned concern that this could compromise the children’s safety and cause them distress. Sometimes alcohol misuse was found to have persisted for a long time, raising questions about the effectiveness of the supervision and review of foster carers. In two cases, alcohol misuse was accompanied by evidence of domestic violence” [*Keeping Children Safe*, pp.105,98].

Abuse of Fostered Children by Foster Carer's Children

"[One case] involved physical violence by a foster carer's non-resident birth son" [*Keeping Children Safe*, p.77].

"Four cases involved a foster carer's birth child who was resident at the time the abuse or neglect took place. All involved male birth children aged between 18 to 22 years at the time the allegation was made. While one case involved physical aggression towards a female foster child, the other three cases involved sexual abuse of female foster children that had generally taken place over a lengthy period of time, sometimes over several years. In two cases the allegations were historic, the young women only feeling able to disclose sometime after they had left the placement. In the remaining case, three foster children (and two adopted daughters) were removed from placement after an adopted daughter disclosed long-term sexual abuse by the birth son, about which the foster carer herself was found to have concealed evidence" [*Keeping Children Safe*, p.77. See also p.97].

Abuse of Foster Carers' Children by Fostered Child

"A council has apologised unreservedly to the family of young children who were sexually abused by a teenager placed with them by social services. Social services staff knew full well about the young man's previous history of disturbing sexual behaviour with children. Yet out of what could be seen as some bizarre and misguided over-emphasis on his rights and concerns, they kept that information to themselves" [*No Excuses for Teen Abuse Case*].

Deaths

"Jonas, a child with Down's syndrome, 'visibly regressed' and eventually died after he was handed over to foster carers ... When the parents were allowed 'contact sessions' with their son, they soon became concerned at how he was being looked after. They observed that his toilet and other medical needs were not being properly met. ... [He] was not being properly medicated for sores and sunburn. He showed small bruises ... serious ailments appeared, including a severe burn mark ... severely infected tooth ... obvious breathing problems ... no proper protective clothing ... bad conjunctivitis, discharges from his eyes and ears ... [their son] apparently collapsed ... but it was too late" [*A Mother's Diary Records the Awful Death of a Child 'in Care'*].

"Social Services ... placed myself and my sister with a foster family without carrying out checks on the man who ... had a long history of violence. Social Services were the ones that failed to carry out house visits when were supposed to, they were the ones that ignored the huge amount of bruises myself and my sister had from beatings even after it being reported to them by our nursery and other people. ... no they weren't the ones that picked her up by the legs and swung her round and slammed her head into the side of her cot, but in my eyes that are just as guilty for allowing it" [comment at: *Baby P and the Death Toll Keeps Rising*].

(C) Runaways from State Care

"Children who go missing from care are being systematically failed and placed in great danger by the very professionals who are there to protect them, according to a parliamentary inquiry report published today [17 June 2012]. The report, by two influential All Party Parliamentary Groups (APPGs), calls for an independent investigation into children's homes in England and asserts that the system of residential care is 'not fit for purpose' for children who go missing" [*Care System Placing Children in Danger*].

"Today's [17 June 2012] report by the APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers, reveals that children in care are three times more likely to run away than children who live at home, often placing themselves in great danger of being physically or sexually abused or exploited. Yet society – including many professionals – so often sees them as 'troublesome', a 'nuisance' and 'drain on resources' – rather than victims" [*Care System Placing Children in Danger*].

"[R]unning away is not always seen as a cry for help. Many professionals perceive these children as 'troublesome', 'promiscuous', 'criminals', or even 'slags who knew what they were getting themselves into' – rather than extremely vulnerable young people in need of support" [*We Need to Protect Children in Care*].

"Half of all children in children's homes (46%) live outside their own local authority, despite evidence that this is often a major factor in causing them to run away. One local authority placed every single child in its care outside its boundary" [*Care System Placing Children in Danger*].

“[T]here were many examples of out-of-area residential placements actually increasing the risks to [sexually] exploited children, with an escalation of missing episodes as they tried to return to their home and sometimes to their abusers” [Jay Report, p.53].

“Some residents who go missing become exposed to the risk of sexual exploitation while out on the streets, while others go missing as a result of being drawn into sexual exploitation. Residential staff often struggle to prevent residents going missing and to protect them from sexual exploitation” [Keeping Children Safe, p.26].

“One of the most startling facts about care homes is the number of children who run away from them. Care home staff are powerless to stop children from leaving. They are not allowed to lock doors to prevent teenagers from meeting their abusers. Physical restraint can be used only ‘to prevent injury’, the definition of which does not, apparently, include the injuries sustained through sexual exploitation” [Unthinkable, p.166].

“Sometimes there may be a good reason to move [children] away from home [local area] – for their own safety perhaps, but this remains rare. Evidence clearly supports the logic that the further children are from their family and friends the more likely they are to run away (usually to try to see them)” [Unthinkable, p.165].

“Incredibly, the solution care homes come up with when children run away is to move them – into another care home, without looking at the reasons why. Some children have been moved thirty to forty times. This is not uncommon. By [doing this], they are spreading the problem as that person brings their history to bear on other residents – not to mention the fact that predators are able to stay in contact with their victims and follow them to a new care home full of new girls for them to exploit” [Unthinkable, p.171].

“I used to go missing all the time ... I went to a girl’s house and there was like prostitution going on there, and that affected me, I didn’t want to be in that environment, and I didn’t know till afterwards. I went back and told one of my care workers about what had happened because it disturbed me, and after that they put on my risk levels ‘suspicion of prostitution’, and since then I haven’t said anything to them, I haven’t told them anything, because I feel like they didn’t listen to me then, they didn’t listen to the story, they had their suspicions that I was a prostitute. I didn’t say anything to them after that. I guess it is the way they perceive things. You say things to them, and in their heads like when they are writing it down on paper, they don’t think about the way it affected you. They just saw it as prostitution, they thought, ‘she might be a prostitute’, and that’s all they wrote down. They never took time to listen to how I felt about it” [Teenage girl in care home, quoted in Unthinkable, p.169].

“Sixteen-year-old Stephanie ... was placed in a care home. She later ran away from the care home and returned to the [N253 bendy] bus. It was safer, she said” [Unthinkable, p.48].

“West Mercia Police informed Ofsted of a private care home in Shropshire that had reported a child missing on thirty-nine occasions between 6 June and 25 October 2011 and had made over a hundred reports in total in that same period ... Ofsted subsequently supported a good award for that home. The child in question has continued to go missing from the home and 130 missing reports have been made in relation to her” [Unthinkable, pp.165-6].

“A recent case was in Telford, and it was two privately run care homes owned by the same person ... they had about four children in each home, next door to each other. They telephoned the police over 900 times, created 300 missing persons reports, and that home got a good Ofsted report” [Unthinkable, p.166].

“Ofsted’s Deputy Chief Inspector John Goldup said: ‘In its inspections of children’s homes, Ofsted regards the issue of missing children as one of the main indicators of the quality of care’” [Unthinkable, p.166].

What Makes Children Run Away from Care? (Joint APPG Inquiry, 2012)

“It helps if you run away because you are going away from what you don’t like” [p.2].

“To get away from where they are living or get away from violence” [p.2].

“Not being happy in care homes, not being listened to, not being happy in care” [p.2].

“Being separated from brothers or sisters, or close friends” ... “Wanted to go and see sister” [p.2].

“Try to get to your own family, rather than stay in care” ... “Wishing to visit a member of your family” [p.3].

“To get away from a new placement they hadn’t wanted to go to in the first place” [p.3].

“Because it’s boring in children’s homes” [p.3].

“Sometimes we run away to get away from other young people, for example being bullied” [p.4].

“Lack of knowledge and news about home came through from some children as a key issue in relation to running away from care placements” [p.8].

“The staff don’t know how it feels to not be living at home ... and not allowed to see your parents” [p.8].

“Many children and young people we spoke to revealed that they weren’t so much running away from things, as **positively running to something** such as family and friends who they were no longer allowed to have in their lives. If services wish to address issues of children and young people running away then it follows that they must take seriously many of the reasons that they believe they have for legitimately doing so, including being deprived of wanted contact with family and friends” [p.4, (emphasis in original)].

“Social workers however have a major influence too. Some of the reasons given by children for running away, such as not liking a particular placement or not having enough contact with family and friends, are matters that social workers exercise considerable influence over” [p.8].

“There is plenty of evidence, both historically and still, that **there are some cases in which children and young people run away for their own protection** to escape abuse and mistreatment that they have been suffering, and are still at risk of suffering. Returning any child to an abusive environment will not stop them absconding, and could well prolong harm that is being done to them” [pp.8-9, (emphasis in original)].

“It almost goes without saying that those who do not feel cared for and treated with respect, are more likely to run away than those who do. Most who told me that they ran away said they did so not for fun, but because **they were deeply unhappy about something that was important to them in their lives**” [p.10, (emphasis in original)].

Now why would all these children be running away, if they were truly ‘safer’ and ‘happier’ in State ‘care’ than with their own families, as Social Services insist they must be?

(D) The View from the Other Side of the Desk...

“My name is Winston Smith, I’m 34 years old and I’m a support worker – sorry, *keyworker* – in the supported housing sector ... I also take on extra, part-time work in residential care homes with children between the ages of 12 and 17. To work in care homes is to inhabit an extra circle of hell beyond the limits of Dante’s imagination...” [Generation F, p.18].

“[I]n my experience, the word ‘care’ in care home can be slightly misleading, in that there often isn’t any – not beyond the absolute basics of food, shelter and Sony Playstations. Moral or spiritual guidance, or even common sense: not so much” [Generation F, p.74].

“It’s really difficult for good care homes to flourish within the care system, because the system is set up to allow the children to dictate the agenda. There’s been a profound and disproportionate shift in power away from adult forms of authority to ‘empowerment’, the sector buzzword for allowing youngsters to live pretty much as they wish irrespective of the objective damage they are doing to themselves. It’s a tragedy, really” [Generation F, p.82].

“In care homes, daily log books are kept, as a statutory requirement. However, what is written in them is often extremely economical with the actualité ... you can’t expect simply to record your experiences in a working day in these journals of deceit ... staff are expected to write up daily reports about the events in their respective care homes as if they inhabit some kind of morally neutral universe, where no judgements or standards exist ... This whole sector is infected with an institutional and ideological form of insanity” [Generation F, pp.141-2].

“Working in care has [a] corrosive effect on the truth. You become hypersensitive to possible misinterpretations of your own words and actions, and some [care workers] become willing Quislings, happy to collude with lies” [Generation F, p.144].

“I remember the intensive support worker I had myself – a woman who taught me how to wash behind my ears, eat my greens and brush my hair. I called her ‘mum’. Plus I had a fella called ‘dad’, too; most kids I knew did back then, and we’re only talking 15 years ago. There were no keyworkers, youth workers, tenancy support

workers, family involvement officers, play co-ordinators or supported housing workers ... But then, I didn't know that the State was actively involved in breaking up families ... if someone had told me this a few years ago, I'd have dismissed them as Tory reactionaries. Since I have been working in supported housing, I have seen evidence of this kind of thing every week, and I cannot argue with the facts when they are staring me in the face" [*Generation F*, pp.64-5].

"I make the decision that I'll not work in residential care homes any more" [*Generation F*, p.147].

"There are those in the industry who delude themselves that it's all going swimmingly ... But lots of project workers and managers will admit that the system is broken – it's just that they will only say this privately ... Everything is built on a lie here ... the British supported housing and social care sectors are in chaos ... the overall picture - of a huge State bureaucracy wasting millions of pounds working counter-productively to its proclaimed aims – is entirely accurate" [*Generation F*, pp.256-7,259].

(E) The State is No Good at Childcare

"The State is no good at childcare, and nothing will ever make it any good at it. Power and bureaucracy cannot create an ounce of love. The State's own care homes are notorious scenes of abuse and chaos, from which many children emerge with their lives already ruined, destined for prison or mental hospital" [*Get Ready to Go to Jail*].

"[M]any children taken from their families suffer far worse abuse at the hands of the £3.7 billion a year 'care' industry than was ever alleged against their parents as the excuse for removing them in the first place. In all the years I have been writing about this, I have found few things more shocking than the continual evidence I get of unhappy children being ill-treated in 'care', whose only wish is to return to their loving parents. This is one of the real dirty secrets of our 'care' system" [*David Cameron Has No Clue*].

"[N]othing is more disturbing about [the care] system ... than the way, once children are taken into 'care', their cries for help when they are abused are ruthlessly ignored. Yet the slightest hint given by a teacher or doctor that a child might possibly have been 'non-accidentally' injured by a parent can have social workers and police rushing round to remove the child into the very system where they may suffer genuine ill-treatment far worse than anything alleged against their parents. So this inhumane system rolls autistically on, determined to resist any real recognition of just how grievously it has gone off the rails" [*These 'Carers' Just Don't Care...*].

"Our children appear to be suffering more in care than at home, so why remove a child to make a child worse? The care system is supposed to help them not damage them further" [comment at: *Children Brought Up in Care Have Far Poorer Life Prospects*].

Can you understand why the Social Services' euphemistically named 'service users' might be just a *tad* hesitant to let the State anywhere near their precious little ones?

The problem with the moral high-ground is that it must always be proven; it can never just be appropriated.

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