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## Press release

### **Local authorities fail vulnerable children leaving custody**

*Chaos, neglect and abuse -*  
new report by the Howard League for Penal Reform

The Howard League for Penal Reform revealed today (6 September 2006) that local authorities are systematically failing to provide suitable accommodation and support for vulnerable children leaving custody, in breach of their statutory duties, and putting the public in danger of further crime.

Lawyers at the Howard League for Penal Reform have represented over 100 children in custody. Almost all the children had suffered abuse and neglect; many had a history of being in care or had been homeless.

The Howard League for Penal Reform legal team found that local authorities across the country are flouting a whole range of legislation designed to ensure that children do not leave custody bereft of support. Many children are returning to precisely the same situation that led to their imprisonment in the first place.

One of the success stories achieved by the Howard League for Penal Reform legal team featured in the new report concerns *Mike*

*Mike was 16 years old and in prison. He had been effectively abandoned by his parents and began offending at the age of 13. He had learning difficulties and had a history of*

*drug and alcohol misuse. Prior to going to prison, Mike had been homeless and was stealing food and clothing in order to survive.*

*There were no plans in place for his accommodation and support on release. Despite numerous referrals, the local authority social services department had stated that they would not help Mike as he was 16 years old and could claim housing benefit.*

*The Howard League for Penal Reform lawyers wrote to the local authority and reminded them of their duties to support Mike under the Children Act. A few days prior to release, his local authority agreed that it would live up to its legal obligations to care for him.*

Chris Callender, assistant director and solicitor at the Howard League for Penal Reform, said:

“Many of the children we have represented are vulnerable and challenging. Some have committed serious offences. Not only do these children have a right to be cared for properly, but if they are not, they will continue to wreak mayhem in their communities and put themselves at risk. They absolutely must be given appropriate support for their sake and for the sake of all of us.”

*Ends*

## **Notes to editors**

There were 2,951 children in custody on 29 August 2006. 214 were in local authority secure children's homes, 264 were in privately run secure training centres and 2,473 were in prison.

- 40-49% had been in local authority care at some point
- 18% were subject to care orders
- 31% had mental health problems
- 40% of girls and 25% of boys reported suffering violence at home
- 33% of girls and 5% of boys reported previous sexual abuse.

In the last year, the Howard League for Penal Reform has taken action on behalf of clients against the following local authorities:

Barking and Dagenham  
Bedford  
Bedfordshire  
Birmingham  
Bournemouth  
Bristol  
Buckinghamshire  
Caerphilly  
Cheshire  
Crewe  
Croydon  
Darlington  
Doncaster  
Enfield  
Essex  
Gloucestershire  
Greenwich  
Hammersmith and Fulham  
Haringey  
Harrow  
Kent  
Leeds  
Medway  
Milton Keynes  
Peterborough  
Sandwell  
Sheffield  
Staffordshire  
Surrey  
Sutton  
Tower Hamlets  
Wandsworth  
West Sussex  
Wolverhampton

The 32 page report, ***Chaos, neglect and abuse: The duties of local authorities to provide children with suitable accommodation and support services*** can be purchased for £15.00, via the Howard League for Penal Reform website at [www.howardleague.org](http://www.howardleague.org) <<http://www.howardleague.org>>

Further information:

Frances Crook      020 7249 7373 ext 108  
Chris Callender    020 7249 7373 ext 117  
Lorraine Atkinson   020 7249 7373 ext 104

ISDN is available on 020 7923 4196 - uses a G722 system. Interviews may be conducted in advance