



***Boarding School Survivors – Support  
Newsletter***

***December 2023***



Dear All,

Wishing you all a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year!

Christmas for all survivors can be a bitter-sweet time, with lots of warm memories of the family together, but also with the knowledge that this is short-lived, and it will soon be time to go back to school.

With *BSS-Support* you are in the company of others who have experienced the same events and feelings as you.

In this newsletter we have:

- [Margaret Laughton](#)
- [Conference 2023](#)
- [Goodbye Uncle Fudgey](#)
- [Call for Volunteers](#)
- [A Book of Boarding Poems](#)
- [And finally...](#)

## **Margaret Laughton**

*Margaret, who is resigning her long years at BSS-Support, writes:*

**A life within a life...**

About thirty years ago, on one supremely lucky day, I picked up a newspaper and read that boarding schools produced people who were "Confident, Competent and Brittle" and very hurt... It was written by Nick Duffell and, as I stood with tears pouring down my face, I realised that those words were a perfect description of me, and that the sadness and puzzle I had felt since I was eight years old could end.

I sought therapy and 'someone out there' understood and *extremely* patiently listened to my story. In time (about three years), the isolation I had created to protect myself no longer existed, and my childhood trauma did not constantly rule my thoughts and actions.

It was hugely liberating on many fronts... and I was wondering what to do with my newly found freedom when the *Association for Boarding School Survivors* was founded by Nick and James Foucar with others, including Gordon Knott. I was asked to join them and was soon followed by Thurstine Basset and Allison Ujejski. Over time, others joined us and we became *Boarding Concern* for many years – and then changed our name to the more specific *Boarding School Survivors – Support*. After twenty years, I have now resigned as a director for health reasons: so it feels time to ponder on, and share, what all this has meant to me...

It all started under Thurstine's kind, gentle, and very sure leadership with his suggestion, and determination, to hold our first conference. With limited previous interest in the subject, this consisted of 51 very thankful and committed former boarders. Many still attend every conference. Importantly it meant that, overnight, we had a group: *Boarding Concern*... and this led us to where we are today.

Starting as a director, I wanted to share my former experiences, which included my years as a boarder and the information and experiences from various pieces of work which had come my way as I went along my own particular path... That path had been varied... Having seen my four children through school, and having always, in parallel, worked with children, I gave up working as a paediatric physiotherapist and volunteered to work at *Childline*... moving on to working there full time on 'nights'.

So, on moving into 'Boarding School Survivor land', having written *Childline* letters for ten years, when the boarding letters started coming to us, I replied to them... and I have done so for many years and will, for now, continue until someone is able to take over...

Alongside that, I started-off and edited all the newsletters two or three times a year, wrote articles, started the poetry collection, went to groups and meetings... and for 20 years I helped to organise our annual conferences. I was also involved in the collecting of articles for, and the editing of, the Women's and Men's books...

But to go back to my point of liberation... I learned, through therapy, that not being alone with my boarding school trauma was *the* most important factor in my journey. Moving on... I found too that talking to people who said, "I went to boarding school", instantly enabled the sharing, and a wealth of understanding and help, which broke through all those years of isolation. Nick's workshop, very profoundly, also did this for me and for many others.

We hope the conferences will always be, and feel, a safe starting place for all who attend so they can have the experience of being with others who will listen and understand. We hope too that they can share their own experiences, and so break through their isolation and their feelings of being alone with their childhood and adult boarding issues...

Crispin Ellison, who was for many years a director, was a very wise, gentle and kind man, and he gave us a great example and star to follow...he said:

*'Everything we do with this work must always be done with great kindness and gentleness.'*

From knowing him, and his warmth and kindness, I always tried to follow this...

So... when I find a former boarder unreasonable or exasperating (as you may sometimes do...) I turn a switch back to that little child of eight or so, crying as they were left at school or into their pillow at night... For me this works, and the adult then becomes understandable... even if remaining difficult and exasperating... And I

fully accept that for the same reasons, I may well be seen as difficult and exasperating too...

Here's hoping that you will find kindness, friendship, solace and help within this *Boarding School Survivors – Support* community.

My love to you all, and infinite thanks for the wonderful help and friendships I have had over the years...

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## Conference 2023

The BSS-Support Conference 2023 was held on 11th November at The Wesley Centre near Euston. There were 99 attendees, not counting the speakers – a record! About half the attendees were women – another first!

It was a very rewarding day, with well-received talks from stalwarts Joy Schaverien and Nick Duffell, and also a remarkable presentation from Tom Greaves about the creation of his one-man show *Goodbye Uncle Fudgey*, which tells the story of Tom's discovery of his boarding school survival personality, and coming to terms with it. The show was at this year's Edinburgh Fringe, and won *Mervyn Stutter's Spirit of the Fringe* award (MERV), one of seven awards given to shows that "deal with unique subject matter in a unique way". This award, out of 133 "demonstrating commitment in the face of little support or funding" shortlisted from over 3,500 shows, "acknowledges and celebrates the talent, hard work, pluck and sheer doggedness demanded of performers from all genres on the Fringe to make a show a success".

The talks are now [available on our website](#).

The afternoon was largely given over to facilitated groups looking at the trauma of boarding and its consequences.

We asked attendees for feedback on the day, and there were 47 responses – half the attendees not counting the directors. We are most grateful to all those who took the time to send us feedback.

In general, the scores are excellent. Here are the highlights:

### Observations

- Overall satisfaction very high
- Location, venue, cost, catering, admin satisfactory, but some negative comments about The Wesley (space, catering).
- Joy's talk was the most highly rated with Tom's a close second.
- Not many responses on the groups, but overall good.

### Comments

- Some really lovely comments, especially from first-timers.
- We have probably outgrown The Wesley - lunch was cramped, food not as good as in the past, milk ran out, audibility and temperature, not enough space for 100+ people.
- Booking admin can be improved - payment by card, reminder and directions a week before.
- First-timers identified on their badges (optional) so can be looked out for and supported?
- More time requested for general chatting and processing: two-day event, perhaps, or two talks not three?
- Groups perhaps still too big; facilitation may need tightening up - more detailed instructions for facilitators.
- Several requests for Tom's show to be put on.

### Sample responses - "What was the best part of the day for you?"

- *I really enjoyed the day. It confirmed my thoughts from last year that this was 'my tribe' and that I needed to attend.*
- *Meeting others and knowing I am not alone.*
- *It was my first conference, so I found it all very worthwhile. The welcome was warm and friendly, the presentations were interesting and there was an opportunity to talk to fellow ex-boarders as well as partners of boarders.*
- *Meeting other people who have experienced similar sort of childhood/educational experience in boarding school is very helpful indeed. I know I am not alone, and there is an amazing sense of others quickly 'getting it' and a shared understanding - which in itself is cathartic and healing... It is*

wonderful that a group like this exists, a huge relief, and I am so grateful for it. Thank you!

- The willingness for people to support each other in a mixed gender group.
- Workshop was amazing, depth of sharing was admirable and facilitation was sensitive.
- A very painful and worthwhile experience.
- All of it!

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## Goodbye Uncle Fudgey



We are having discussions with Tom about a performance of his show, *Goodbye Uncle Fudgey*, in London in April 2024. This would be a fund-raising event to contribute to the costs of the development of a touring version of the show. There would also be a reception, so that we can have a bit of a get-together. If you would be interested in this, [please let us know](#).

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## Call for Volunteers

We have been thinking for some time that we should increase the size of the board, and this feeling has become focussed with Margaret's retirement. So, we are putting out a request for one or two people to come forward and become directors.

BSS-Support is incorporated as a company by guarantee, which means that it is not-for-profit: any surplus is accumulated and cannot be distributed (i.e. there are no shareholders). Another way to put it is that we operate as a charity. We could be a registered charity, but that would place constraints on us that, to date, we believe would be too restrictive. We operate on the margins of polite society, and the establishment is not too enamoured of us!

We are funded by donations, which we use to support those who come to us for help, often very distressed. We provide bursaries for the Boarding School Survivors workshops, and we subsidise those who could not afford the full fee for our annual conference (this year, 12% of places were subsidised).

As a board, we meet periodically online, and the tasks divided between us include:

- responding to those who come to us for help;
- producing the regular newsletters;
- organising the annual conference; and
- administration of the organisation, meeting statutory requirements.

This is not an exhaustive list, and we are open to new ideas. If you think you would like to contribute to any of this, and/or you are itching to suggest new horizons for BSS-Support, we should be very glad to [hear from you](#).

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## **A Book of Boarding Poems**

Poetry can be a powerful way to express our feelings about the boarding experience and our recovery from it. We have been collecting poems on boarding for a number of years. There is a regular *Poetry Corner* at the conference, and the poems can really strike a chord. We now feel that the time is right to publish a volume of boarding poetry.

If you would be happy for your poem to be considered for this, please [submit it](#) - even if you have sent it before - accompanied by the statement: "Please consider this poem for the proposed BSS-S poetry book". We will be in touch about the progress of the project.

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## And finally...

This newsletter comes with warmest best wishes from all of us at BSS-Support:

Allison Ujejski, Jane Barclay, Mike Dickins, Paul Fray and Sam Barber.

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Boarding School Survivors - Support

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