

Anonymous Blog by Care Experienced Young Person

Being experienced in the care system, I was always told one thing that everything would go downhill at 18. This is something I never listened too as all I have ever wanted was to be out of the system and free, how possibly could things get worse? But the truth is, no matter how bad the system treats the young people within its care, it is still all we know. You think you know what being alone feels like, but then I realised what all those older LACS meant when they said they dreaded their 18ths. I have seen it first hand, if it wasn't for the transition team from our LA (which is a separate team from leaving care which are not statutory) I definitely would not be sitting here writing this.

Me and Dan met when I was placed into a 'semi-independent living' what we knew as 'TM'. It wasn't the nicest of placements, admittedly, but I had been battling homelessness whilst trying to sit my GCSES as my LA left me homeless and refused to accommodate me as people 'higher up' than my social worker said no. So after nearly a year, I was grateful to have anywhere to live, to even have a bed. I had just enrolled at a sixth form college round the corner, and to my surprise so had Dan, who I had already stereotyped in my head as a bit of a 'Scrount' like what most people do when it comes down to kids in care. I was shocked to see him in there, I remember thinking 'wow as if you come here'. We then started speaking outside of 'TM' when we often met outside for a cig; we soon became very close friends. Dan who actually was from a posh area and hadn't struggled as much as me, who was from a rough council estate and would be stereotyped as a 'chav', we had two totally different pasts and were 2 totally different people but yet we got on so well. Things at the time seemed so good but actually it was a really unhealthy place to live, but at the time we really classed it as our home and after a couple of months, our LA started handing out 28 day notices for the fun of it. Dan was a CIN and I was LAC, so Dan got the notice first as they started with the CIN first. This led to months of distress, complaints, none stop drama because unlike a lot of kids in care, me and Dan have a voice, an opinion and we stand up / fight for something if we want it. So many people got their bags and had to leave, without putting up a fight, because like a lot of us have been fighting all our lives and that's why we have ended up in the system and I think some people just couldn't be bothered anymore and eventually I felt this too because it was emotionally and mentally exhausting. The 'Transition bedsit programme' started running and Dan was offered a bedsit but I was not, as my 'Mental Health' was a concern, and they wanted to place me somewhere else. I was placed in a number of units before getting my bedsit as I had to 'prove' I was mentally stable before I got my bedsit. This happened to be facing Dan's, again! 'TM' was a traumatising experience, our SW came one day with bin bags and told us we were all being removed on the day and we all had to pack up and get out with no warning, me and Dan obviously rebelled and barricaded ourselves in our flats until higher management from our LA rang us to tell us they would take our LAC status off us and we would then have nowhere to live, we would have been unable to continue with our studies due to having no accommodation and without our LAC status we would have no entitlements. This to me was enough to cave in. I did not have any other options, no more friends sofa's to sleep on, no family to turn to, I NEEDED my LAC status, and without it I would have nothing. I had no choice but to pack up and move out and Dan did the same. The bedsits were not the nicest of places. But unlike any other placement I had ever been in, even my old foster parents, did not give me as much support as that programme did. Without them, me and Dan would not be where we are today, I now work for the LA I once was under care for, I started as an apprentice and got took on full-time, planning to do a part-time degree in SW, Dan is studying a Law Degree full time, but most of all, we both got brand newly built apartments, 10 minutes away from each other and have now been able to fully move on with our lives.

At 'TM', we were always told we would be down at housing options on our 18th birthday, as getting post-18 was VERY very rare. I watched numerous young people on their 18th birthday wake up to a knock on the door with nothing but heavy duty bin bags and told they need to get out as their placement / funding ended today. Imagine that, the birthday that near enough everyone celebrates the most, gets so excited for, goes out with their friends or get amazing presents for this special birthday, and yet we in care have to dread that day like it is doom day. I don't see how that is fair, to spend such an important birthday in a waiting room in housing options to then hopefully be told they've found you a b&b or a hotel. This is was very common under our LA. That only support network you felt you once had, it is all you have ever known, to then be turfed out at 18 like a kick in the teeth 'well you're an adult now you're not our responsibility'. Would you do that to your own child? Would your parents have done that to you? Oh here's a PA to support you, someone you've never met but yeah they don't have to see you or make contact you go to them if needed, for them to tell you the things you already know because you know the system better than they do anyway. Why is it ok to play pass the parcel with our lives? I think a lot

of people forget that is what it comes down to in the end. Our lives, because that social worker goes home to his family, or that phone operator goes and picks her kids up from school. But the placement you're coming to visit us in, is OUR home and OUR life. We spend our childhoods trying to find a home, trying to fit in. And then for what, for you to take it away from us and tell us well you're an adult now you need to sort yourself out, pay your rent, bills etc. Me and Dan are lucky to have had the support given to us right at the very end of our time in care, we fell lucky and have had support with everything within our tenancies etc. But if it were down to leaving care and we remained at 'TM' until we were 18, we would have been down at housing options too, I would have never got the job I have now and Dan would have never finished his A-Levels. We were left to rot, but then we were saved. But there are so many others LACS out there in the same situation, many of mine that are close friends. Those that are in supported lodging placements and worried about their 18th approaching as they are unsure whether they are going to be able to stay there or not. The support there for care leavers just isn't good enough. Some of us have been through really traumatic experiences that have left long-term implications for the rest of our lives. We don't have anyone else to support us; we have corporate parents that drop us like a sack of spuds when we reach that 16-18 stage. It isn't fair; me and Dan could have easily ended up down that path. But where we are now from where we were 2 years ago is truly amazing, we spend nearly every other day together, we do normal things that we could never do back then. We have an amazing holiday booked next year; we go for tea or to the cinema or go on nights out. We do all these things that 2 years ago we never thought was achievable because before the transition team, we all knew we were going to be screwed when it came to us turning 18. Dan turned 18 first and I remember that anxiety 8 months before, like it was a countdown. It was a countdown for him losing his home, not a countdown for how excited he was to see how many presents he was going to get. By the time I had turned 18 I was already in the bedsits, the support did decrease a little – but I still always knew they were there. Even now I keep in contact with the team, they nominated me at the Greater Manchester Care Leavers Awards which I won and was the first ever person from my LA to ever win. I think they were more proud than me... 😊

Every child deserves that support, I say child because even at 18 that is what we are, we are still the vulnerable child we were the day before 18 when we were 17 and seemed more relevant to you. If you had met me years ago, I was not the same person. I did stupid things, made bad choices, I had no fear of consequence, I didn't attend school, I couldn't even count to ten properly when I was around 15, and I had never loved anyone or anything before and vice versa. I was not a nice person and I am so glad to not be that person now, because I was so full of hate and if my little brother hadn't have been born I wouldn't be where I am today. It helped me become the person I am today, and all I ever wanted to do was support him and give him everything he needed / needs, so he has everything I never had, the transition team helped me achieve that because without them I wouldn't be standing on my own two feet so without them I wouldn't be able to put clothes on his back and that is why I am so ever grateful for what they have done / continue to do, but I have also worked god damn hard for this too. But there are only so many bedsits, 7 to be exact and very many LACS/ care leavers on the waiting list to get one. The rest that are under the leaving care service and are in placements often get left behind, they are unheard / unknown of and they get swept under the carpet as like I say, not every child has a voice as strong as what ours were. But just because they don't have that shouldn't mean that they get left behind.

I am a strong believer that there needs to be some massive changes for the Leaving Care system, I believe that we should be offered more support, I believe there needs to be many changes and ECLCM campaign speaks sense to me. There needs to be more work / communication with housing associations so we are at less risk of homelessness when leaving care, there needs to be more services out there to offer us emotional support, there needs to be a process where every child under leaving care should have an opportunity to work for the authority whether as an apprentice, placement work etc. but most importantly we need time to grow up a little bit before we are thrown out into the big wide world! How many 16-18 year olds do you know that are ready for living as a full adult? Not many. We are made to grow up too quickly and there's nothing we can do about that, we accept that that is the life we have been given. But please, as a corporate parent, treat us like you would treat your own. Any different is just unfair and we have been through enough to get where we are now.