

*We are all too aware of the difficulties that being in care can bring, particularly when it comes to the all too often failure of the 'care system' to address children's emotional well-being and preparation for leaving care. Here Ben, one of the ECLCM founder members, writes about his own experiences and how many years after leaving care he still faces some of the demons from his past.*

Last year nearly my Last Year:

Back in early December 2017 having completed the last of the presentations following finishing the walk from Halifax to Parliament to raise awareness for Every Child Leaving Care Matters #ECLCM, I can on reflection appreciate that I had already started to slip in to a state of severe depression. My anxiety was going through the roof in a way that I'd never experienced before and I was starting to isolate away from everyone and everything.

My life had gone from being amazingly busy training every day for the walk and making preparations for it but once I had completed the journey I was left alone, at home alone. I had no more conferences, events or seminars to do. That I had raised massive awareness and united many people, organisations, and charities seemed a distant memory. The walk was a real success and was one of the best experiences I have ever had. But I hadn't planned for coming home to nothing and with nothing to do.

I was sitting at home, isolating myself and struggling to keep positive or to be able to control my thoughts, feelings and emotions, I was struggling with some deep-seated issues that had grown over the years but had never been addressed. I'd had no therapy, no counselling or support for the vivid images I was now seeing, I was consumed in negative thought and having flashbacks of serious incidents that I had experienced as a child and young person and I just couldn't handle them anymore. It wasn't that I was just thinking about ending my life, I was having trouble not thinking about doing so. I was consumed. Just constant voices in my head telling me I was a piece of shit, no one likes you, and that I should just go and end it. "No one will be bothered if you aren't here, Ben", the voices told me. I had the liar in my head filling it with crap; but it was crap that I believed which I believed.

After many months of struggling at home I reached the day when I decided I couldn't take it anymore. I wasn't dealing with the daily trauma I was experiencing. I didn't want to be here anymore. I was going to end my life that night. I waited for my sister to go to bed because I knew she would put her phone on silent and wouldn't be disturbed by me. She would wake up as usual except that she would see the message I had left for her. I told her I was sorry that I wasn't strong enough to carry on and the world and her would be better off without me being here. I was just a hindrance and problem. A problem that people had had enough of seeing and hearing.

I was walking around all night trying to get the courage to do it. When I did, I headed for the location that I'd decided was going to be the end place. I had been walking round for weeks with a rope in my bag waiting for the right time. I got to there and set the rope up and put my head in it. I then just stepped off the wall. I didn't even get that right - the branch snapped on me. Was I lucky? Yes, but I was gutted at first but also really scared. After a few minutes I packed the rope up and headed to the train tracks. I sat there until the first GNER train came shortly after 5am. The train driver must have seen me from a distance because by the time he got to where I was standing, he had almost stopped the train. I panicked and got off quickly and went home, thinking on my way this isn't my time.

Once home I messaged my sister and told her I was alive and that things hadn't worked out. Shortly afterwards she arrived at my house and took me into her care. I was quickly admitted to a crisis bed where I stayed for the next 2 weeks waiting for a bed on an acute ward on a hospital ward to become available. This happened eventually and I was told I was going to Dewsbury Hospital, Ward 18. I had been there before and, on that occasion, I had discharged myself after an hour but this time I knew that if I didn't stay then I wouldn't get through whatever it was I had to deal with. I had some small insight, it seems but I was my own worst enemy now.

Over the next seven weeks I went through hell. I had to deal with so many emotions and thoughts. I was consumed in serious thoughts of harming myself, scheduling and re-scheduling how I was going to do it, where I was going to do it. I had never experienced anything as bad as this before. I didn't think I was going to make it to Christmas with the head I was carrying around on my shoulders. I had to deal with anger, lack of sleep, not eating, and walking round like I was about to explode. But over the weeks I improved and after six weeks of not leaving the ward and I had to be supervised because I still wanted to chuck myself under a bus.

But after weeks of painting, therapy, doctors, nurses, health care workers but mainly the OT, a man called Lee, who was working there and with whom I formed a good relationship him I began to learn to trust him. He was an artist and showed me how to paint. I actually wasn't too bad at it either. Over time I painted many paintings and fell in love with it.

I have been diagnosed with adjustment disorder which is very similar to PTSD but my belief is that it depends what doctor diagnoses you as they try avoid PTSD as a diagnosis. I was also diagnosed with an emotionally unstable personality disorder. I think they're close but my personal diagnosis would be that I have Complex PTSD. I've been out of hospital a good few months now and cannot believe the transformation I've gone through and continue to do so. I have a new thirst for life and want to make the most of the life I have.

Without my sister and a few friends that helped me out in a time of need and supported me through those hardest of days I believe that I wouldn't have made it. Without these people I'm not sure if my recovery would have been as successful as it seems to be. I'm working hard every day to address my problems, behaviours and demons. It has been the hardest year of my life. I'm lucky to still be here, on another night I wouldn't be here.

I'm now working on building a brighter, positive, balanced and more fulfilling life. Now that I'm here to stay I need make the most of this second opportunity at life. If you take anything from this please don't judge and be kind as you never know what other people are going through.

Never Give Up! ♥