

## Tony Butcher presentation

### Transcript:

Good afternoon everyone I just briefly going to talk to you about the experience I've had with the care system within social services and within the sort of providers that I've then had experience with. I'd like just to begin really with how it began. It all began from day one realistically with the memories I can remember, I was in foster care, I've lived in care the grand total of thirty nine different times throughout my foster care experience, which ranged from foster homes to adoption homes, to refuges to any sort of different things, so I've had quite a vast experience to say the least, and within that I've also had anywhere between seven and ten social workers, not that I'm fully aware of exactly how many I've had.

So I mean I've had quite a lot of experience with him in – because I've had not just a lot, you know, just how I've learnt from it, really whilst I was a young person in care, one thing that really stuck with us was that I was very stable in school, my education was very, very tight, it was very good and that no matter where I went, I lived in the northeast, but I could be a mile away from my school or possibly ten to fifteen, twenty miles away from my school, but one thing that really helped me become who I am today was the education, that's one thing that's stuck with us and stuck with us throughout the system, that really caught us. But the lack of stability of social workers and at the same time, the lack of stability of being in foster placements really impeded not just my life but impeded on many other children's lives. I think that average from what I've heard when I speak to young people is around about four to seven different placements, and even that in itself would be a struggle and it was for myself. But that sort of lack of instability really doesn't help a child thrive and certainly not for a young people in terms of hanging on.

Similarly, you know, whilst at school, for young people today, a lot of people seem, not just myself, but a lot of young people seem to stand in front of a crowd, not necessarily for the good things, but I mean, a lot of perceptions about what the foster children can do and adoption people isn't really seeing people of what we'd like to be. A lot of people have negative thoughts that they will come out with, really, I'm just trying to raise what it was, I think as well as what other children spoke to in that, we really want to stand out from the crowd for good reasons. We don't necessarily want the attention in school or in education, where we're brought up, because we're a foster child or because we're looked after, we really want the attention of, ah well, we're doing great, we're just doing like the other children are or the other young people, and that's sort of really cultural as well.

The fact that a lot of my placements with different social workers were struggling, especially with the leave in care services, that was very difficult in itself because once you've left care, you're left on your own two feet and if you're having different social workers as well, all the time different PAs that people talk about, that again really impedes sort of development as a human being and someone who needs to work.

I mean, I was speaking today with one of the care to work programme and that in itself was a great programme and I think things ... those sort of initiatives that you are driving and bringing, it's not just about care to work, but from a young age, prevention and anything like that, it really sort of helps the young children and young people today to develop.

I was also asked to tell you guys about what really did work at the society, obviously, what did work within social services. A lot of things that did work was especially throughout my leave in care experience, was being in touch with the [inaudible 00:03:58] panel. I don't know how many of you are aware of the panel itself or if it exists and what it does. Well, it brings a lot of different kids together and I think there's about 120 young children today and that's sort of [inaudible 00:04:12] panel, you can have a voice, you're even allowed maybe to have a thought in there, the ability to communicate what I really thought on issues, I mean, issues from governmental issues and what they ask about inspectors, what they ask about schools and the education, that sort of ability to have that voice really helped me and a lot of other young people. We have forums of people to speak to and it just helps our confidence and our ability to get through these things and I thought things like the care to work system, things from intervention and everything that has been provided today is what people have been provided with in the future, really does impact on our lives and I mean that is a positive and really will drive that sort of focus. And really I just like ... that's where I'd like to end and close my little talk about, just that everything that you're provided with today, whether you see it in the frontline services, whether you see it in the managerial services, to reports, it really does impact on young people's lives today, not just my own, I'm just somebody who the young people, I provide contact with. But people that I don't have contact with, I hear about all the time stories about how we've had amazing social workers, we've had really good chances and opportunities to become ... the young people that I've spoken to, young people in development projects, it really does make an impact on our lives and it does make a difference and that's how I'm going to finish it.

[Applause]

**Presenter:**

**Tony, thank you, that's rather encouraging that despite some of the really nervous things that you were saying about the number of placements, the kind of confidence and skill there, something went right for you, and it was good to hear something about it in the summary at the end, we've got a minute or two for any questions if there's anything you want to put to Tony? And there's a gentleman right at the back there.**

**Questioner:**

**Hi there, I'd also like to thank you for being here and speaking out and not just for yourself but for other young people, so that's good to see at a conference like this where we're all focused towards helping people like you and others to overcome some of the barriers and difficulties that you obviously face in your own lives. I hope this question's not going to be too challenging, but it's really about what you said about the stability in placements and the social workers, from your perspective are there things that you can see, you can tell us, that you think would make things better for the future in relation to stability with both placements and social workers?**

With social workers, with respect, I realised throughout the cases in my life when I was growing up there was always a constraint with the workload, it used to be I think on average when I was in the system around about seven caseloads per social worker, now I would say it's around about fifteen and those caseloads really make it infeasible for people to see a child more than once a week or even once every fortnight and the inconsistency applies when the children lose that relationship with the social workers, they're like [inaudible 00:07:24] for myself, I didn't have any family, I didn't have any [inaudible 00:07:27] people, once I left the care system my only direct line was my social worker and within, I think it was about three months of being in the care system actually [inaudible 00:07:36] social worker, everything again, that changed again, it was – to repeat that story, to repeat the – you can't build the relationship in a long lasting thing, it's very hard to decrease the caseloads that social workers have so that they can keep that relationship, but they're sort of – though PA workers are more of social workers these days and it's not necessarily a great process to go through, but I'd like to think it's something to manage that if they could keep that relationship going with young people, with the response to how many placements are in, that's, to me, that's quite a unique sort of stance being in thirty nine different placements all ranging from different times.

That was simply not being able to plan from a young age, I mean, twelve times in one year, simply because neither the social services nor my biological parents could decide whether they wanted me, or they wanted me, it was a fight in between them, and that should have been sorted at quite a young age and just to be able to say, "Right, this child needs to be helped in this way" and I didn't think that was done in my case or in several other cases where I have been spoken to. I think one set of people need to take the right direction, either social services could stay and say "This is where we need to go from here" or the biological parents say, "Right, we can do this", but we've got to take the full situation, the child [inaudible 00:08:57] in the full situation.

**Presenter:**

**Time for one more question. Yes, in the front row.**

**Questioner:**

**Hi Tony, June Bishop from North Somerset Council and I'd also like to say thank you for coming here today and sharing your experiences. I was just wondering because obviously you've quite a chequered history and clearly not [inaudible 00:09:25] you talked about education has being the main focus of stability, I was just wondering whether you actually formed any real true meaning relationships with the amount of professionals that you came into contact with throughout your time in foster care and whether within that you could identify somebody who was safe in terms of being able to share exactly what you wanted and what your wishes and needs were?**

Definitely a good question because, you know, with a lack of stability it's very difficult to have that sort of relationship with people and with myself, I ended up being a sort of self-sufficient person that I happen to be, to survive, sort of thing, to get through whatever, I always had the drive to go into education regardless of where I lived, I always thought, right, school, university then job, then career. Whereas a lot of people today, I don't think they're sort of driving towards the career prospect, it's about getting a job, it's not necessarily about getting a career and I think a lot of – especially a lot of people in foster care lack that sort of, you know, drive and lack that help and the ability to focus on a career, develop socially for society itself and for the individual and for the person, relationships really – I mean, foster carers came and went, so I couldn't get to them, family came and left, so I was left seeing the social workers, it was very difficult again just to gain that sort of relationship of closeness and to be able to talk to a social worker and say, "This is what I actually need" rather than just having – they'd say what you want to hear sort of thing.

So I think stability is very good with building those sorts of relationships and stability, creating that stability for the person in the future for when they do leave care, how are they going to confide, how are they going to survive, how are they going to say what they want, you know, when they meet anybody else, they couldn't do it when they were younger, how are they going to do it when they're older? But I think this is something, I think the relationship with at least one good social worker or if it was a practitioner or if it was – even a school teacher would have been really just someone to talk to, but I think that's what certainly needs help and sort of needs to fight for sort of thing.

**Presenter:**

**Tony, thank you so much.**

[Applause]