

## Vulnerable (Looked After) Children

### Thriving beyond care

#### Transition from care

Narrator: If you are a counsellor interested in the welfare of Looked After Children this film is for you.

Local authorities acting as corporate parents need to drive up standards and improve resources for looked after children. For one former looked after child, Tony, leaving care five years ago was a traumatic experience.

#### Former Looked After Young Person

Tony: I didn't have any of the skills that normal people would have, but I couldn't cook, I didn't know how to use a washing machine, I didn't know anything. It was a bombshell, I cried, I broke down, I completely and utterly, everything, my whole world came down on us.

Narrator: Tony has since turned his life around, graduating from university, that's very unusual. Estimates suggest that only about one per cent of looked after children go into higher education. But a difficult transition from care can badly effect the life chances of looked after children. Local authorities recognise this and are increasingly putting in place support and guidance. In Lewisham a supported lodging initiative is improving outcomes.

Martin Hudson: It's important that they have somewhere safe and they know that they are going to be there and cared for. Without that, they will be unable to develop their skills and resilience for the future.

Narrator: Back in his hometown, Tony's memories are painful.

Tony: I was alone and it was a horrible, it was a horrible, horrible feeling. My social worker had found me somewhere to stay it was a hostel type place, there was about sixty to a hundred rooms. The workers who worked at the building seemed to be nice but the children, or young people, because there was any where of age sixteen and thirty I think, weren't people I would usually socialise with, there were people who had come out of prison, doing drugs, alcoholics, young people that basically society wouldn't want.

*Tony cooking eggs in his kitchen.*

Never really taught how to cook when I was in a foster placement. I had to live on my own very quickly. I didn't have the facilities to cook; I didn't have all the tools. So I've always lived on microwave meals, sandwiches, a lot of sandwiches and takeaways. I'm attempting to cook an egg now.

Narrator: The one constant in Tony's childhood was his secondary school.

Tony: Having one school as a constant really meant a lot to me because I was actually quite stable, quite happy. That kept me on the straight and narrow that kept me to go, really, from strength to strength.

Narrator: Tony used that strength to get himself a place at university, a degree and now a job. Today he lives a successful, independent life. He has thought deeply about his transition experience.

Tony: A simple transition period would have been nice; cookery classes would be great, money management. I'd like to think that, not just my local authority, but every local authority would like to help their young children to get a career. The fact that I had four different social workers would need to change and that's just for leaving care, never mind being in care. When you haven't got a foster family anymore and you haven't got your own family the only constant person in your life should be that social worker especially going into the real full world where you're not helped anymore at all.

### **Lewisham, South London**

Narrator: In Lewisham, South London, the supported lodging scheme gives young people about to leave care a secure base in which they can develop practical life skills.

Sue Martin: *Try a bit..*

Seventeen year old Ellia has been living with Sue Martin for more than a year.

*Supported Lodging Scheme - Sue Martin teaching Ellia to cook in her kitchen.*

Sue Martin: *This has got herbs in it this cheese, look can you see?*

Ellia: *Yeah.*

Sue Martin: *You put it on like crackers or you know like the flat bread we made.*

Ellia: *Yes.*

Sue Martin: *You can put it on there or maybe have it in salads as well.*

Ellia: *Yeah.*

Sue Martin: *My main role is really to ensure that by the time Ellia leaves here and goes into his independent living that he's ready to do so. Things like helping him with budgeting, cooking; it's been really enjoyable working on that.*

*Can you eat this?*

Ellia: *Mhm.*

Sue Martin: *Yeah, you want to taste it?*

Martin Hudson: We recruit local people who have a spare room, they will be trained and supported and they will help the young people, provide, develop their skills and confidence in a very personal way. It's actually being supported and having a personal approach to that support that makes the difference to the young person.

### **Looked After Young Person**

Ellia: I am so down sometimes, I've missed my family and Sue helped me in this way you know she's like a mum for me. I always think she is my English mum.

Sue Martin: Sometimes you just have to really kick in with the nurturing when you just know, there's no particular time, now and again just think I'm going to cook for them today.

*You now know how to do a dinner party so when you've got your new flat and your own independent living, I get first invite.*

Martin Hudson: You don't necessarily have a cut off point at eighteen because we very much think that young people have to be ready to move on, it's a key area and in Lewisham we have a housing protocol, which enables young people to have their tenancy from eighteen but not necessarily at eighteen.

Narrator: Once young people begin independent living the local authority support continues.

Martin Hudson: We actually support young people whilst they are in their own tenancy. So, we will provide sometimes floating support so that they still have backing even though they have the responsibility for the tenancy and all the bills that come with that.

Narrator: A mentoring scheme also provides ongoing support.

Martin Hudson: In a normal family the young person would just get that support but we recognise that people like mentors and support providers can undertake these small things that would normally be undertaken in families.

Looked after children in Lewisham are a priority for the whole Council, the mayor takes particular interest in our looked after children and their progress and the services that are provided to them. We also have a

corporate parenting group who will hear from young people directly and about the services they receive and what they think the services should be.

Narrator:

The key message from Tony's experience and from Lewisham's scheme is that safe, settled accommodation is essential for a successful transition from care. Once living independently, young people need personalised support, mentoring schemes, out of hours support and opportunities to return to care; are all services that improve outcomes. And Tony's experience, also born out by C4EO's evidence, is that involving young people in decisions as well as providing access to life skills like cooking and money management can instil the confidence needed to thrive beyond care.

End of Recording