

## Care Leavers' Stories project

David Mulcahy

Interviewed by Rahma Mohammed

C1597/04

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# Social Care Institute for Excellence

## Interview Summary Sheet

## Title Page

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**Interviewee's  
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**Sex:** Male

**Occupation:** Student/ unemployed

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comments:**

**Track 1**

*Hi.*

Hi.

*Could you tell us your name?*

David Mulcahy

*David. So would you like to tell us a little bit about yourself, like what you're doing now, where you live, kind of?*

I'm twenty-seven years old. Currently unemployed. Live in North London. Mix with the snobs in Haringey – in Highgate, sorry. Yeah. Love sport. Like going out. Normal things [laughs] somebody in their late twenties likes doing.

*How long have you lived in North London?*

All my life.

*Your whole life?*

Except a couple of little spells when I was in care when I was out of London, but pretty much – probably out of twenty-seven years, I've probably spent about twenty-five of them in the borough of Islington.

*Okay. And you've enjoyed living in Islington? You've not felt the need to branch out and ...?*

No. I get out – like I get out and travel about enough and that, so I sort of – it's nice when I get out of – out of London for a few days, but I sort of – I think I'd miss it if it was any longer than a couple of weeks.

*Yeah. So you mentioned that you didn't stay in the borough, well, for a couple of – you know, whilst you were in care. Where else did you go?*

Sidcup in Kent, Somerset, and that was pretty much it, really. Most – all my other time was spent either within the borough of Islington or next door in Haringey.

*So what's the contrast between those?*

Living in Somerset was – it was nice in one respect because you just had so much space, but it was – it wasn't as nice as London in the fact that everywhere sort of shuts down at six o'clock and it's like – you go out after eight o'clock in the evening, about all we had was the local drive-through McDonalds, everywhere else was, like, shut. So you sort of have to try and bunch everything you're going to do into – into sort of like – and when you're going to school and all that, it's like – you sort of come out of school, there's not really much to do after school apart from just run around and sort of occupy yourself indoors. So it's sort of like – you've got to try and bunch everything into one Saturday, because obviously the shops ain't really open on a Sunday 'cause of it being so rural.

*What about Kent, was it?*

Erm, Sidcup weren't too bad, to be honest with you, 'cause it's very close to – like it's one of these places that is called Kent but I still call it London because, like, all the buses around there are still London buses. It's still London trains. You can still use your travel card. So postal wise it's classed as Kent but I still class it as London. So that weren't too bad. I lived right next to Sidcup station, so I was able to get the train, be in Charing Cross in a – within about forty-five minutes, so ... I was still coming back to school here. I was only there for about six weeks anyway, so didn't really get a chance to sort of blend in with Sidcup, sort of just – it was more of a place to stay rather than a home.

*Why do you think it wasn't a home for you?*

Because it was an emergency unit that I went to, so – it was a residential unit that only ever had people there for no more than eight weeks. They could do it a few more weeks if a council was desperate and they were struggling to find a young person a place, but more often than not, most young people were there for no more than eight weeks. So you couldn't really sort of – when you went there you were told it was a very – it was like a short term placement, so you couldn't really put any roots down.

*How did that make you feel?*

Erm, at that time it made – at that time it was – I was alright with it because at that time I didn't want to be in care, so to sort of hear that somewhere wasn't going to – like I wasn't being expected to adopt somewhere as my new home, it was like ... It was – as I said, I just sort of – I was always coming back to the borough. So it was really just somewhere to put my head down at night and somewhere to sort of – it was like a glorified hostel, really.

[04:08]

*You said you didn't want to be in care, so how did you end up being in care?*

Just because of situation within my family. My mum was in a relationship that social services didn't agree with, so they sort of took me and my brother into care. And at the time I was running away quite a bit, so ... I sort of – I suppose you could say I kind of put myself into care really, 'cause I sort of like ... it's hard really 'cause I was – like, I was getting reported missing every night but I wasn't really running away. It was just the fact that I was staying out late. I was just being what I class as a normal sort of like teenager, or I was acting like a teenager when I was, like, ten and eleven, so I sort of – I don't really think it was anything big but it was just because I wouldn't be back at night, when my mum said at eight o'clock and I'd sort of roll in at half twelve in the night. And I'd sort of be – have to be reported missing every night and it just – so I suppose that's why they took me into care.

*How did you first feel when you went into care?*

Erm ... I sort of adopted the it's me against them sort of policy, 'cause I sort of was so used to people coming in and out of my life, so I just sort of adopted the policy that it's me against the rest of the world and sort of just took a very sort of selfish approach to life. I was just like, if it benefits me, if it's to do something with me, then I want to go, but – so for a short time I had to sort of just take that approach to it. It was like me against the rest of the world.

*What about your brother?*

We stayed together very briefly but then we got separated, so I sort of – because I was sort of placed at different parts of London to him, it was very difficult to see him, so I sort of just had to – he sort of had his life – we were never that close as kids, but ... it was just sort of – the sort of thing, it happened and I just had to – rather than worry about attachments, I just had to, erm, concentrate on myself.

*So you were kind of by yourself and alone. Did you not have any friends, any support system that you could rely on?*

I had friends but it was a case of – I couldn't allow myself to get too attached to anybody because I had to sort of just – in order to cope – like it's a bit like when someone goes to prison, really, in the fact that at that time I was sort of treated like that, in the fact that I had my sentence, so to speak, to do, which was being in care, and it was just – get to sixteen and be able to walk out and get to eighteen and be able to walk out the system altogether. And like there were milestones that I just wanted to get to and it was a case of, this is my plan, I've got to get to that milestone and then sort of re-evaluate things when I get to that milestone.

[07:11]

*In your questionnaire you said that you experienced both sides of being in care, the good and the bad. Could you elaborate on that?*

I think, looking back at it now, it's easy to see things with the benefit of hindsight. There were placements that I was at that had I have just opened myself up a little bit and allowed people to help me, it could have been a great success. When I was down in Somerset, classic example, if I'd just sort of stayed down there, done my – done my education like they were asking me to do, then – like at the age of thirteen they were talking about putting me forward for my GCSEs, so had I have just – sort of rather than running away back to London every – like rather than running back away to London every, like, week, if I had just sort of stomached it and said, I don't want to be here but it's going to benefit me, then quite possibly now I might be sitting here with a university degree and sort of a very well paid job. And then obviously the bad side is that I've been to placements where they just – staff just didn't care. The first one where me and my brother went to, the staff there, it was just a job for them. They were getting their money at the end of the week and they didn't have a need to care for the young people because – the young people were just there and it was just – it was their job, so – you could sort of get that impression from them when they were – like they wouldn't go the extra mile, they wouldn't try to help you, they just – it was a case of I'm clocking on at eight o'clock and I've got to do this till, like, two or three o'clock and then I'll clock off again, sort of out of sight, out of mind.

*So what do you think – if you had stayed in Somerset, how do you think things would have turned out for you?*

Million dollar question, that is, like. I don't know if I'd have pass my GCSEs at the age of thirteen, but I'd have definitely sort of – had I stayed in Somerset till I was sixteen then I would have almost certainly come out with very, very good, if not excellent, GCSE results, because obviously I would have had two or three years to keep on going at them, to sort of like – I think I would have had a better – I think I would have a more open mind in the fact that I don't think I'd be so sort of like – London is the only place that I can ever live, sort of thing. I would have got used to living somewhere else and I think I would be able to appreciate the countryside and appreciate the town life for what it – what it is.

*You speak so fondly of Somerset. Can you walk me through a normal day when you were there?*

It depends where I was – like I lived in quite a few different places in Somerset, so it would – it would depend, really. Like in my normal placement, it would be getting up at seven o'clock, bath or shower, breakfast, getting ready for school, going in the house car to the school. They used to have their own, like – they had their own in house school centre as well, so go there, just do your lessons. We had a pool table for break times, shop next door to it. So yeah, just basically going to school, doing what a normal child would do at school. And then in the evening, go home. Depending on what day of the week it was, if it was a Friday night it would be a takeaway night. If it was Tuesday night it was snooker. If it was Wednesday it was cinema. So there'd be activities in the evening after school that the – that Sedgemoor College, where I was living at the time, put on. It just – it would depend more on what sort of worker that we had on that night, 'cause the house had three different workers. So if we had a worker that was – we had one worker that was really into his snooker so we had a – if he was on we'd always go down the local snooker hall and probably be there for about three or four hours in the evening, playing snooker and pool.

*Did you get along with the workers there?*

Yeah, I got on with all the workers there. Just a pity about the person I had to live with [laughs].

*What about the – the other children living there?*

Well, there was only me and one other person in my first house and he was – he was very similar to myself in the fact that he was a very long way away from home as well and he didn't want to be there any more than I wanted to be there, so we sort of just tried to bug each other off. Like we'd sort of be very uncooperative when it suited us. So if we were doing an activity that I wanted to do, I would – he would sort of go, 'I'm not going, I'm staying here,' and refuse to leave the house, which would mean we couldn't go out on the activity. And vice versa, I'd do exactly the same.

*Why do you think you were so similar?*

‘Cause we both had very similar – I think we both came in in similar circumstances. So neither of us wanted to be in care, neither of us felt we should have been in care, and I think we both were desperate to be at home with our – he wanted to be at home with his mum, I wanted to be at home with my mum. So I think we were both – looking back at it now, it’s silly really that we didn’t just sort of combine forces, so to speak. Like the fact that we spent so much time trying to pee each other off meant that we couldn’t put as much time into trying to disrupt our placements, which is what we were trying to do.

[12:29]

*How did you feel about your mum when you were there? Did you miss her?*

I missed her loads. I was always running away, back to London. I remember – it was funny. I remember when I first moved down there, my social worker said to me – she didn’t come with me when I was – for my first night down there, and she said to me before I left London, she went, ‘I’d like to see you try and run away from there now.’ I was like – and it was just like a challenge. So every week I sort of would get my school bonus or my house bonus and – which was another version of pocket money, and just try and find different ways of getting up to London, coaches, trains ...

*What was the relationship like with your social workers?*

A lot of them, it was very much me against them and it was just – I didn’t like – I didn’t want to – because I just didn’t feel they ever listened to me. Like even at the age of twelve when I came into care, I felt that I could have looked after – if somebody had just said to me, ‘Right, there’s fifty quid a week, look after yourself,’ I would have been able to do it. Like even at that age I was very independent and I could – I could have looked after myself, so ... I was kind of doing it in one respect, so ... I think it wasn’t until I got into – into my care leaving years that I sort of came

across a social worker that I really thought – if I'd had her when I was twelve then I think my service would have been totally different because – well, I know it would have been totally different. Like life would have been just – it would have been transformed because she – I just really got on with her. I don't know whether that was because in later years I come to sort of understand things a bit more, but I think it was also the fact that she just knew me as a person. She knew exactly how to sort of, like, work with me in a way that I didn't feel patronised or belittled in any way.

*What about your foster carers?*

I spent one night in foster care. Never – never ever wanted to be in foster care. I didn't – didn't want a new mummy and daddy. I wanted – I was quite happy with the mum I had, so ... didn't need a new mummy and daddy, so it was always residential for me.

*So you didn't – how was the contrast between being in foster care for that one night and ...?*

That one night, I got there at – I was taken there by the police at – I think just after half twelve, and I was sort of told, 'Oh, this is your room and this is the person you're going to be sharing it with.' And the person who I was sharing it with was fast a-kip. And I was just like, I don't want to be here but I sort of have to be for at least the next eight hours until social services opens, so – it was either that or a police cell, so ...

[15:13]

*So did you get in trouble with the police a lot then?*

No, it was more just being caught in the West End when I supposedly was missing, when it wasn't that I was missing, I just didn't want to [laughs] – I was just out in the West End, enjoying myself.

*Do you think your mum ever understood that?*

I think she did but I think her hands were tied because – like she knew me well enough to know that I'd always be on one of the last – like the thirty-eight bus went past my house, so I knew all the drivers on there and she knew me well enough to know I'd be on one of those last buses, so she'd always be sort of outside our estate at twelve o'clock at night sort of looking out for me 'cause she knew I'd be on one of the – one of the buses between twelve and one in the morning, so. And the drivers knew me well enough to know exactly where I'd get off, so. But it was one of these things where the social services told her, you have to report him missing because if he doesn't come back when you tell him, he is missing.

*Did you ever think that if you'd maybe listened to your mum and came home earlier, things would be a lot different for you?*

They probably – they would have been, I'd have stayed there, but I'd have been in poverty and I would have – I would never have been able to afford the things that I wanted or needed, so ...

*How's your relationship with your mum now?*

Erm, we talk [laughs]. No, it's okay. I think the problem is, like, as I said, now I've sort of – I understand things a lot better and I think there's just – there's some scars that just will never heal, so it's about knowing that they'll always be those sort of like black elephants in the room and just sort of going, okay, well, we know they're going to be there and we just can't get rid of them so let's just sort of find a way to work around them.

*Can you give me an example of those black elephants?*

Well, again, when we came into care, my mum's relationship. She was sort of given the choice, like, her kids or her relationship, and 'cause she couldn't make that choice, social services made it for her, so ...

*Did you feel as though your mum being in a relationship affected the way you had to grow up?*

I think – I think that was just – it’s an easy way to look at it like that, but I think it was just – it was a cherry on top of the cake, really. Like social services had the cake but they never had that cherry and no matter how much hassle I was causing, they could never sort of find that – that one last, like, straw to break the camel’s back and Mum sort of gift wrapped it to them, so ...

*What was wrong with this relationship?*

Just – social services had some worries about my mum’s partner and his history and ...

*Was he ever – how was your relationship with him?*

I just sort of humoured him, like he was – he was my mum’s boyfriend and that was it. Like I wasn’t about to start calling him Daddy and I wasn’t about to start, like, treating him like he was my dad, so ... yeah, he was just my mum’s boyfriend as far as I was concerned.

[18:31]

*So how was, you know, moving around a lot in these different care homes, how did that affect your friendships?*

It affected it in such a way that I couldn’t really make sustainable friendships, like with peers. Like I was never sort of living in a – in one area where I could sort of go down the local youth club and sort of get to know people and sort of – so a lot of my friends around my own age that I’ve made have been through the system and people that I’ve sort of met up – like I’ve come across in the system and sort of been in the same location as them for a few months or a few weeks and sort of struck up friendships with them that way.

*Why do you think that was?*

Erm, I think because, as I said, I wasn't in one place for very long and I think when – when you're sort of looking at people in the same service as you, it's like – it's a little bit easier. It's like a badge of honour. It's like you're sort of walking down the road going, you're a fellow care leaver, or you're a fellow kid in care, and it's – it's like – so I think it's easier because you sort of know that they can't judge you whereas other people sort of will.

*So you felt as though other people would kind of stigmatise you?*

Yeah, I've had that a lot. I've had – I've had people – like I've lost friends over it when their parents have like gone to me, 'Oh, I feel so sorry for you.' And I'm like, 'I don't need you to feel sorry for me.' [Laughs] 'I don't want your pity. It's like – there's nothing for you to feel sorry for me about.' And it's like – and you get the other – you get other people that think, oh, were you taken into care 'cause you're a naughty child? No I wasn't. I was taken into care because that was what a judge decided was the best thing for me at that time. And you sort of – I think people don't understand – it's getting better now because a lot more work's going into it, but I think when I went into care in, like, the late '90s, early '00s, that was sort of like – people didn't really know what being in care was about. It was like, oh yeah, if you're in care it's either your parents don't want you, you're a naughty child or you've been severely abused, and – well no, it's not. Like there's a lot of kids that are in care for that but there's a lot of kids that are just in care because it's the best thing for their personal development.

*What about other relationships? Did being in care hinder your ability to ...?*

Erm, no, I think it was always [laughs] me being interested in making money and always wanting the best things for myself that stopped that side of a relationship, so ... [Laughs] I think, like, personal relationships were just sort of like – it was the last thing on my mind 'cause I was more interested in sort of making sure I had the things

that I wanted and needed rather than, like, bothering to go down the pictures with a local girl or ...

*Okay. So what about, like, your birthdays and Christmases and just celebrations, how did you feel on those days?*

Erm, I think it was a mixture, really 'cause – it just depended where I was. Like I've had some good birthdays but then I've had some sort of birthdays that – it just – it was just a date on the calendar sort of thing. Same with Christmases and that.

*Did you ever get the chance to meet up with your brother and your mum?*

Yeah. Like I went back home when I was fifteen, so they sort of like – and then when I was at home I used to – my brother always used to come up and see my mum and I used to go down and see him, so – when he was living in Deal in Kent, so ...

[22:22]

*You got to move back home when you were fifteen?*

Yeah.

*How did that come about?*

Well, I was about fifteen and a half and it was basically because social services just accepted that I was a – I was a lost cause. I remember my social worker and her manager saying to my mum at the time, 'We're giving him back to you because we can't be – we're finished with him now. We've had it. We've tried everything and it's not working. He's a lost cause. He'll have to go to prison before he can save himself.' And it was like – to sort of think of professionals that are sort of like saying that about a child that is supposed to be in their care, yeah, it was – it was hard to take, but it was ...

*Did you ever feel that they could have done more for you?*

I think they could have, actually. Like I think when I was in Somerset the problem was at that time – that was probably one of my best placements. That was probably my second best placement. And the biggest problem with that was the distance to London and the fact that I wanted my mum down there every week and they were only prepared to let her come down once a month. And they sort of saw it as a challenge rather than a – like rather than sort of just working with me and saying, ‘Right, what do you need to make this placement work?’ it was more of a, ‘Okay, well, we’ll try and – we’ll challenge you and we’ll sort of make it as difficult as possible,’ which would then just make me think, well, there’s even more reason now to – to, like, do it and make it happen.

[24:03]

*So after you left care, how was your relationship with your mum and how was settling back in?*

I think it – we lived together [laughs]. It was like I was sort of – by then I’d sort of become extremely independent and I didn’t need, like, my mum to do much for me, so – it was living having a lodger. I suppose for her it must have been like having a lodger, ‘cause, like, we didn’t really sort of like do much as a family. By then it was like I was out all hours or I’d be up all night watching the cricket, so ...

*How did that make you feel, to have a family but not maybe –*

To be honest with you, it’s what I wanted, ‘cause by that stage I was just – I’d sort of, like, got so fed up with, like, the way things were going, like being in care and coming out of care and sort of – I didn’t really feel like over the time in care that I really got that much support from – I got support from my mum but I didn’t feel I got that much support from her and I just – and I just think that at the same time I’d sort of got very, very independent, so ... I sort of just didn’t need – I wouldn’t say I didn’t need my mum, but didn’t need her in a sort of like – what people would expect me to need her

in. Like it was just more of – she was the tenant of her flat [laughs] and I was just – it was somewhere for me to put my head down every night. It was somewhere for me to sort of have as my base, as my launch pad, so to speak.

*Did you ever miss your brother in that situation?*

No.

*Why?*

Because by then I'd got to sort of like three and a half years, seeing my brother probably five or six times. I sort of just ... I just got used to not having him about. Like it was easier to sort of – not forget about him, he'll always be my brother, but it was easier just to sort of get used to him not being about than it was to sort of sit there and desire a relationship with him.

*So you'd never wished it to be different?*

In hindsight I wish it could have – like, obviously I wish me and my brother could have stayed at home with my – with my mum all the time, but that obviously didn't happen so it was about sort of taking the – the hand I was given and making the best with it and ...

[26:33]

*Where was your dad?*

Never seen him.

*Never seen him? How do you feel about that? Did you ever wish you could change that?*

Erm, I did at one stage, but I've now just got to the thought that – I've just got to the sort of point in my life where, if I was really that important to him then he would have, like, tried to come and find me. So the fact that he hasn't tells me that ...

*Do you think that's changed the way you see things?*

Erm, I think it's changed the way I sort of look at life and look at – if I ever have kids, I know that they're mistakes that I won't make. So I think it's – I think my upbringing has taught me a good lesson in the fact that if I ever become a parent I know the mistakes that were made with me.

*So you weren't – don't make the same mistakes.*

I won't – no, I won't.

[27:40]

*What about, you know, any traditional – like, you and your family, did you have any kind of –*

Not really. Like we – like 'cause my family are Irish, we've got St Patrick's Day. But yeah, I've never sort of like ... To be honest with you, once I went into – after about a year of being in care I just sort of like – I went into a shell. It was sort of like – so things – like meeting up with family for, like, times just didn't really – it wasn't a priority of mine. It wasn't an interest of mine, 'cause I was sort of very much – does it benefit me? If it doesn't benefit me then I'm not sort of taking part.

[28:26]

*You speak so much about, you know, the bad side of being in care. Do you have any fond memories?*

I have lots of – like Somerset would be – like the times we used to go out and play snooker, like ... I had lots of really, really good times in Somerset, even – like I remember one night when we were out playing tag at a place called Wellington Monument and it was quite a wet night and it was like muddy and all that, but that was part of the fun of doing it. And I sort of was trying to hide and I – I fell down this ditch and I went into mud up to here. And I sort of like [laughs] – and like the member of staff in the house went, ‘You’re not getting in the car like that.’ So I had to walk two miles down the road back to the house [laughs]. I was just like – and I’m like head to toe sort of thing, near enough, in mud. Where most people would be sort of like fuming, I was just walking along the road laughing ‘cause it was like – it was – it was funny how it happened. And yeah.

*Did you create any friendships with any of the other kids in any of your other homes?*

There’s – I’ve, like, kept in contact with quite a few people that I was in homes with at one stage or the other. Like nowadays most of them, it’s like just a, like, hello, how are you, like the odd – like it might be a text at Christmas or a text at New Year or a text on their birthday or a message on Facebook, but ...

*Would you – would you have liked that to be more?*

Erm ... It’s hard ‘cause I think ... as I said, I was sort of like very much centre of the realm myself rather than anyone else, so I couldn’t expect – I certainly couldn’t irritate – I wish I had sort of put a bit more effort into maybe making some friendships with a few people, but ... there’s a few people that I wish I had made more of an effort with, but at the same time there’s no guarantee that they would have wanted to have sort of – like, I think at the time the friendships suited both – both parties in the fact that it was nice to make a friend but it was sort of like convenient that person would probably be moving on in the foreseeable future.

*Did you think that that made you so reserved – what do you think made you so reserved whilst in care?*

Erm, I think the fact that I realised from a very young age that anything I get – anything I want in this world I'm going to have to make happen myself rather than expecting life to sort of just fall on my lap and go – so you sort of – as I say, I became very much – for a stage of my life I became very self centred in the fact that it was all about me and only me was important, so ...

*You've talked a lot about you just being by yourself and, you know, you mentioned how the staff in the homes, some of them didn't really care about you and were just there for the money. So who do you think actually cared about you? Not cared for you but cared about you?*

Erm ... when I was living in the placement at London, Tufnell House, Tufnell Park Road, it was – yeah, I know the staff in there all cared about me. I went there twice. It was the only one of my placements that I've lived at twice. I went there before Somerset and I went there after – when I came back from Somerset I went to the – that's when I went – lived in Haringey, I sort of lived in the other home within the same group, because I wanted to go back to Tufnell House but there was no space. So I sort of was waiting at this other one and as soon as a space became available I moved back to Tufnell House.

*Why did you leave there in the first place?*

Social services wanted to try the country approach and send me down to Somerset. Me and the staff at the home said that it wouldn't work and – the staff felt they were making really good progress with me at Tufnell House and ...

*Do you think if you had just – do you think it was mainly you that made social services move you around or was it just social services that –*

I don't think it's either or – either or neither. It's like – it's one of these things that I think is both, like – but I do put a slightly more blame onto – not even blame, I do apportion slightly more of it to them because I think at the time I was a child so an adult should know more than me. Like an adult should be sort of like – rather than

getting into my games that I'm playing as a child, like the workers are adults and they should perhaps sort of like be able to turn the other cheek, so to speak, and say, 'Okay, well you might be – you're playing these games but we're not going to stoop to that level. We're going to carry on doing what we know needs to happen and we're going to look after you.' And I think, as I said, there became a stage where I think some workers just decided to sort of go [claps] wash their hands of it and say, to hell, like, we don't care anymore.

[33:52]

*In your questionnaire you say that you helped to bring a new ethos to the community of Islington. Why do you think you felt the need to do that? Why?*

I think, when I came into leaving care – when I left care and I was coming into the leaving care team, things were at an all time low. Like we had one manager and an assistant social worker, that consisted of the leaving care service in Islington and then it was tended out to the private sector. And I think that was a big opportunity for me because I was sort of – was able to get involved massively with the new company and I was sort of – I wouldn't say linchpin 'cause I think linchpin's a bit of a – but I was very – I was very involved with the new company and, like, Shaftesbury Homes really did sort of get young people involved. I was involved with, like, selection of social workers, of managers. I even went right up to where I was at one stage a young person's trustee for the whole organisation, so ... I think they really did give people a chance to get involved and they brought a whole new ethos with them. But then with my work with the Children's Active Involvement Service I got to sort of put more of a paw print on Islington, so to speak, than sort of nationally.

*What do you think drove you to act on behalf of –*

I wanted to change the services that young people get. I wanted to make sure that the wrongs that I felt were made with me, the things that I felt were not done as good as it should have been, was changed. And it has been to a certain extent. I think things have – I think it's that pendulum that things have gone from being really sort of dire

to – they've now swung the other way to they're on the verge of just going to, like, all time stupidity, because I think there's – I think there's got to be a balance and I think the balance has slightly tipped the other way now.

*Do you think, now that you've been helping, it's changed more or ...?*

As I say, I think the balance has sort of swerved slightly the other way now. Where I think desire was to get a very even sort of service that sort of is open to helping everybody, I think it's now sort of slightly tilted the other way in the fact that Islington have now said they won't put any kids in residential care. Well, not all kids want to be in foster care, so I think they're – like that's one thing that I don't agree with in the fact that – I know that's what all these reports and that, when they come out, say that foster care is a better environment, but I think there are some kids out there that ... especially if you've taken kids into care later in their life, then foster care might not be the way forward for them. Yeah. As much as I don't think residential units should be used as much as they were, I don't think they should just be totally sort of got rid of and forgotten about.

*Do you think, if maybe you had given foster care a chance, you'd have a completely different opinion?*

No, because I know foster care was not – was not for me. It wasn't for me. I'm not saying – I think foster carers do a brilliant job and it's – like the fact that when you think some foster carers put themselves down to be short term foster carers, I think they're – they're the ones that really do get my ovation because they sort of really do put themselves in the firing line, because they're going to – quite a few of their cases they're going to get are going to be kids that are in a volatile state, kids that have sort of been moved around a bit or have had to be moved at the last minute, so they have to really sort of put a lot more work into those cases than if they sort of know they've got someone for five or six years.

[37:56]

*So now as an adult, looking back, what do you think you've kind of gained from the whole foster care experience?*

Erm [sighs] ... I think from being in care in general, I think I've realised that ... take time. Like, in one of my old placements, one of the staff learnt me a saying from the West Indies called Tallahy and it meant take time, and I think that's what I'd say to myself now. Take time in life and just sort of – don't think in haste and sort of give everything a chance.

*So your transition to independence after you left your mum. How old were you?*

Seventeen when I got my own flat.

*Was that provided to you by social services?*

Yeah.

*So how was that? Did they offer you any help?*

Erm, well, to be honest with you, it was sort of like – my mum booted me out on my seventeenth birthday so it was like – it was – I didn't really get the opportunity to sort of like be given that much help. I was just sort of bunged in a bed and breakfast and sort of told, 'Well, you're going to have to apply for your own flat and we'll hold the tenancy for the first year, so ...'

*Why did your mum kick you out on your seventeenth birthday?*

'Cause I think – well, it was the day after, actually. I think it was just the fact that things had got to a point with – with my mum where mine and my mum's relationship just wasn't functioning. I think we'd sort of hit those mixed up teenage years about four years late [laughs], but that was probably 'cause I wasn't at home, so. Yeah I think my mum couldn't – I don't think my mum could sort of, erm, cope with the fact

that I was independent and didn't need to sort of be tugging on her apron strings every ten seconds, sort of thing, like some kids do.

*Would you – looking back now, would you have worked harder on your relationship?*

No. That part of my life I don't regret one little bit because – I've now been in my own flat for ten years – well, it'll be ten years this August and, yeah, it's ... I'm pleased. Like I've got three months left until I hit that ten year mark. If you'd said to me when I first took my flat that I'd be in my own flat, like, independently for ten years, I'd have laughed and said ... So the fact that I've made it to ten years is a real achievement. It's an achievement that not a lot of care leavers in Islington in my sort of generation made. Like when I got my own flat, most care leavers had their flats for about a year, maybe two at the most, and I've sort of been one of the few to sort of hit that ten year mark. So yeah, it's – I don't – I don't regret any of that because I – I wanted to be independent. As I said, I'd have probably – if they'd offered me my own flat at twelve, I'd have probably – I might not have been able to cope, but I'd have had a damn good crack at coping. So yeah, I think it – I think I always felt it came five years too late, 'cause ...

*How did your mum – how do you think your mum saw you after you left? Do you think she was ever proud?*

I think me and my mum have had a difficult relationship in the fact that we've never sort of – like we've been more like brother and sister than sort of like son and – like mother and son. So I don't – I don't think we've sort of ever had that sort of lovey-dovey relationship and I don't think we ever will, because I just think there's – as I said earlier, I think there's some elephants in the room that we've sort of just accepted are there and they're always going to be there and neither of us is going to accept that we're wrong, so ...

*Would you have liked to have that kind of relationship with your mum?*

Erm, in some respects, yes, but in other respects, no, because I'm pleased I didn't because it's given me that sort of grounding in life that – anything I want I'm going to have to make happen myself. And like always to work hard at everything. And it's also given me that grounding that if I ever have kids, I'll sort of – won't make the same mistakes that my parents made.

*What about your mum and your brother, how's their relationship?*

They've got a much more sort of close relationship. So I think – I don't think they've sort of like got a lovey lovey-dovey relationship, but I think they've sort of – have managed to find a way of working through any issues they had together and ...

*How does that make you feel?*

It's sort of always been like that so it's never sort of like ... Like when I sort of was growing up, I always saw my grandparents more – more as my parents than my – than my mum, so ... I was always very, very close to my grandparents. I was much closer to my grandparents than I was to my mum in that – like I saw – as I said, I saw my mum as that sort of big sister rather than a ... So I think, whereas my brother has always sort of – because my grandparents, they sort of loved my brother but they didn't sort of love my brother in – they didn't – like I think – 'cause I had – like both my parents, like, were from Irish backgrounds and that, and my brother, his father was from the West Indies, so – or West Indian background, so I think my brother always had that hill to climb whereas I didn't because I was sort of like the blue eyed boy, so to speak, with my grandparents. So I think it was always – my mum treated my brother a bit better than – because she had to sort of compensate.

*Would you – would you have ever kind of wanted to mend that relationship with your mum and try and put things aside?*

I think it's hard 'cause, as I said, we're both stubborn. Neither of us wants to sort of give in, so ... I just think that it's one of those things that – it may in time sort of pan out, but I don't think it will.

[44:32]

*How did your grandparents feel when you were first taken into care?*

My nan was – my nan was – had already passed away three years before that. It was – it was kind of funny, really, but I think that was where my sort of – life at home sort of started to unravel was when my nan sort of passed away, ‘cause my nan would never have seen us go into care. So ... Like I think when my nan died, that sort of – my mum and my granddad didn’t really sort of talk. So I think that sort of took a lot of the support networks away from my mum.

*What about any other members of your family?*

I mean, I think – my family is – it’s complicated in a way because they’re very, very good at knowing who each other are but they sort of – we don’t keep in contact as much as we – as we should do. Like I’ve got a whole load of family who live down in East London and I sort of – they’re probably one bus ride away from me but I don’t really sort of go down there. I’ve probably been down there once in the last five years. I talk to them very occasionally on Facebook but I don’t make as much of an effort as I should do and they don’t vice versa, so ...

*Would you like to make that effort?*

Erm, I think the problem is, a lot of my family I don’t really have much – whereas my mum sort of could go down and see, like, our cousins in East London, she’s sort of got childhood memories of them and that and she’s got more in common and I don’t really have that much in common with them. So it would be difficult to sort of – I think, to sort of make that relationship any stronger. But it’s definitely something that I’ve been interested in, ‘cause I’ve been doing a lot of work on my family tree, so it’s definitely something that I’m sort of interested in is family and family background.

*What about your brother’s dad, was – do you ever see him as a father figure?*

No. No.

*Why?*

Erm, I think my brother's dad was more interested in booze than he was – like I think him and my mum had a very fractious relationship, so. Like I think he wanted to be my dad but just – he couldn't sort of – I don't think he could sort of put it – I think it's one of these things where somebody agrees to be a dad but they sort of can never put out of their mind that that child isn't theirs.

*Was he different to your brother?*

Much different. My brother – my brother couldn't do any wrong in his dad's eyes. Like if we – if we were caught trying to look at the TV when we should be in bed, it was my fault, not my brother's fault. If we stayed playing out later, it was my fault, not my brother's fault. So I sort of – I think where my brother was concerned, he was like – he was a bit like me and my grandparents, if we did anything wrong I was sort of not told off very much but my brother was sort of like given a good talking to. So I think ...

*And how did you feel about that? Did it ever make you –*

It made me hate my brother's dad, really. It made me sort of – I don't hate many people but it made me – yeah, it made me just sort of like ... It was one of these things that – it just sort of – because of, like, him being violent to me and my mum, it just made me over time just sort of hate him.

*Would you say that's what hindered your relationship with your brother?*

Oh, almost certainly, 'cause I can't talk about my brother's dad unless I'm prepared to make out that he was the best thing since sliced bread, and I know he wasn't. My brother knows he wasn't. That's – I think that's the thing that's hardest is the fact that

my brother sort of knows what went on. It wasn't like it was, like, his dad done what he did in the first, like, four, five years of my life and my brother came along after that. My brother was there and he sort of like witnessed it, if not was next door to a lot of the stuff that went on. So he was there. So like ...

*What sort of stuff did your brother's dad do?*

Just – he was very violent to me and my mum, so – well, more violent to my mum but then when I'd sort of try and protect her he'd sort of turn on me, so ...

*So this kind of resulted in you being taken into care?*

I think [sighs] it didn't help, because – because of him and my mum and for the amount of years that it went on, that sort of kept social services involved, so. Which again I think didn't help because my mum for years would be asking for help and they'd be saying, 'Oh, let him help,' but he was part of the problem, so ...

*Now how is your brother's relationship with his dad?*

His dad's dead. His dad died about ... be about five, six years ago, maybe even more.

*How did you feel when you heard that?*

Erm ... I wouldn't say overjoyed but I didn't – I didn't shed a tear. Like I sort of – don't get me wrong, we had a few good – there was some good memories, but they were few and far between. So as much as I sort of remember those, it was more the violent side of him that I sort of remembered more than the ... like he was a really kind man when he wanted to be, but the problem was he could just flick like a switch, so ...

[50:36]

*Could you give an example of his kindness?*

Well, when we were kids he used to take me and my brother over to Discovery World in Clapham Junction. It was like an indoor play area. And he used to take us to Westland Heliport. And then there was another time when I was being looked after by this woman who lived across the road from my mum and she was like a local pisshead, or a local alcoholic, and he sort of saw me with her and he was like – he was trying to take me from her. He was like, ‘Look, I’m not letting you look after my son. He – he shouldn’t be with you.’ Like looking back, he was trying to protect me. And then, like, she hit him over the head with a brick and he assaulted her and I saw it all, so I could have stood up in court and cleared him, so to speak, ‘cause what I would have – like what I would have been able to tell the court was that she hit him over the head first with a – a brick and he was just swinging his arm back and caught her with his elbow, so it was all self defence, but he was very much like – like he said to his solicitor, ‘I don’t want him standing up in court. I don’t want him giving evidence.’ So he sort of took a prison sentence when ...

*How old were you then?*

Erm, I was about seven or eight at the time.

*How did that affect you?*

Erm ... it – it’s a mixture, really, ‘cause I was glad he was in prison ‘cause it stopped the violence between him and my mum, but at the same time I was always sort of brought up to sort of tell the truth and, like, the right – right from wrong. So as much as he didn’t want me giving evidence, I wish I had because I was always taught to tell the truth and unfortunately there was a miscarriage of justice that happened there because, like, the jury weren’t privy to that information. They sort of heard about it but there was no sort of witness to back it up.

*Would you say that those years he spent in jail was a factor to his outrage and ...?*

Well, this was towards, like ... this was towards the sort of end. Like he sort of – like when he come out of prison, he was sort of determined to try and get me and my

brother off my mum, which sort of spiralled things a bit more with social services, got social services more involved.

*Why was he trying to take you off your mum?*

He just felt he – well [laughs], he said he felt he could do a better job, but ... he said he felt he could do a better job, but I personally think it was just because he wanted the benefits.

*Why would you say that?*

‘Cause ... there was an occasion when we did go and – my mum, who suffers from depression, sort of needed a bit of time to herself, so we went to live with him. And his idea of – like we were living in this bed and breakfast with him, social services were paying for it, and his idea of looking after us was we’d go down and get our breakfast in the morning and then dinner would sort of be a couple of bags of crisps and a chocolate bar, because he’d sort of like – a lot of the money social services were giving him, he was going out and spending on booze.

*Did you ever think that maybe he was trying, he did try?*

I think him and my mum both tried, but just – yeah, I don’t think they were given support. I think, had they been given – both on separate occasions, I think, in our lives, if they had been given the right amount of support then it could have stopped us from going into care, but it’s one of those things that – hindsight’s a great thing [laughs].

*You mentioned earlier that you were somewhat overjoyed by your brother’s dad’s passing. How did your brother take it?*

He was devastated. Erm ... ‘cause it was his dad and it’s like – I was lucky in the fact that – because I’d never met my dad, I hadn’t made that connection, so ...

*Were you able to console him?*

Well, I went to the – I went to the funeral. Like he was living down in Kent at the time, so it was very difficult but, like I went to the funeral with him and all that, because my mum was sort of asked to stay away by his dad's sister, so I sort of went there to support him. But ... it was difficult 'cause he knew my feelings already, so ... I think as much as he accepted that I was there supporting him, it felt like – he must have been thinking that inside I was sort of laughing my head off, which I wasn't 'cause – as I said, there was some – there was a few good memories, but ...

*How did he pass?*

He died with – he had pneumonia and discharged himself and was found on a bench coughing his guts up, apparently, so ... wasn't a sort of – I suppose in one respect it was – when I heard I was sort of like sad and – because I was like – you don't want to think of anyone dying in pain. But yeah, it – I suppose part of me felt it was a twisted sort of version of fate.

*At the time was he still living with your mum?*

No. He hadn't lived with my mum for about five years before that.

*By this time you weren't living with your mum either?*

No.

*Do you think that maybe, if you had been living with your mum, you and your brother – things would be different if he wasn't living there?*

I think it's hard. Like, it – as I said, they worked okay together, but – it was one of these things where they were good, they were really good. When they were bad, they were just atrocious. It was like ... you wouldn't sort of want to let a guinea pig grow up in that atmosphere, let alone two kids, so ...

[57:15]

*Describe the good times.*

Erm, what as a family or ...?

*Yeah, as a family.*

There wasn't, like, a whole heap of, like, great, great times as a family. It was more sort of like either me and my brother with my mum or me and my brother with his dad. Like as I said, sort of together they sort of just plodded on, really. Like I think the only real family, family one I can remember is when we went down to Southend one day on the – we had this, like, little – we had this National Express bus thing that used to stop right outside our house and go straight to Southend and we sort of went down to Southend on it and had a day at the beach. It was – it was nice. It was a proper family day out. But it was like one in about a million available days, so ...

*Why do you think that wasn't – that didn't happen often?*

'Cause they just didn't work well together. I think they – his dad used to drink quite a bit. My mum was always across West London, looking after my nan and granddad, so – or looking after my nan, so ...

*If it didn't work so well how – why do you think they were together for so long?*

I think, like a lot of people are in this world, they just settle and – like I think there's a lot of couples out there that know things aren't great but they sort of – they're scared of what's beyond. Like it's about seeing that door but not having the courage to pull the handle and walk through it. There's a lot of people that sort of just settle for – like they get – they feel content with what they've got and they just don't want to risk losing it and sort of having nothing.

[59:10]

*So you mentioned that your – your brother's dad had a sister. Why do you think your brother – you and your brother weren't looked after by your brother's dad's side of the family?*

Because I think my mum would – my mum would have rather, like – I think my mum would rather kill us and kill herself than sort of let us go – like my brother – my brother's auntie and my mum never got on. They sort of hated each other. So I think ... I think my mum didn't want us living with anyone but her. Like even my granddad wanted to take – take us, but I think my mum felt like it was – if we were taken into care it wasn't so much that she had lost, it was – whereas if someone else sort of took – took us – like got custody of us and sort of did a better job then ...

*When you were –*

*Female: It's been an hour now so is it okay for us to stop? Is it okay?*

*Yeah, it's fine with me.*

*Female: That has gone very quickly.*

[Pause for Break]

[1:00:25]

*So once you left care and you were in your own flat, how was your first night? Can you remember it?*

Erm ... my first night in my – in my own flat, it was a bit – it was terrifying, to be honest. Not – I think terrifying is a bit strong. It was scary, 'cause I sort of had very little there. I had a sofa and I had a microwave. I was waiting for all the other stuff to be still delivered and it was still quite echoey when I spoke; it was like errr. So yeah, it was – it was just – it was scary 'cause you just didn't sort of like – I had no telly there so I couldn't sort of – or I didn't have my stereo so I couldn't put my music on

or watch telly. So I sort of got back quite late and it was like – it was just a bit – although I had lightning and all that, electric, it was just sort of like boring and – yeah, like the second night I ended up having a mate stay over ‘cause I was just that bored on the first night [laughs]. I was like I need – otherwise I’m going to go out my head, so. Once I got all my stuff in there and that and, like, carpet was laid and all that, it was ...

*Who paid for all that stuff to be delivered?*

Paid for it out my setting up allowance, so – like I was giving a setting up allowance by the council and ...

*Were you helped to settle in and – did anyone help you?*

Not really. I was sort of just given the keys and sort of like – I went and got the keys myself and I had my social worker sort of checking in whether I was okay, but other than one phone call I didn’t really sort of like ... I was sort of just – it was – ‘cause it was more of a – it was a sort of – pardon me. They didn’t really sort of like – they didn’t have a plan for a seventeen year old to sort of be in their own flat. That wasn’t - sort of it was more of a – push came to shove and they sort of had to do it rather than wanted to.

*Did you feel as though you needed that support?*

Erm ... at the time I didn’t, but looking back it would have helped. But knowing me, the way I was then, I’m not really sure. I think I gave that impression that I was extremely – like I was extremely independent so I sort of gave that impression that I didn’t really need or want any help.

*Do you think - even though you gave that impression that you didn’t need help, do you think it was a duty for social services to provide you with that support?*

Yeah. Yeah. Very much like when I was in care, very much when I was in care, I sort of feel that, although I might not want it or I might be giving the impression I don't want it, they have a job to do and they should have been – they should have been the adults. So I know at seventeen I should be old enough to sort of know what I want and what I need, they should've still been sort of there to sort of say, we're here if you need us and we're sort of going to give you the support that you need.

*At seventeen, who taught you how to cook and ...?*

Myself. I knew how to cook when I was, like – I learned when I was thirteen, when I was sort of living in my – like Tufnell House, when I was living there, every Saturday night you cooked for yourself. Like we had a cook Monday to Friday but – and then on a Sunday the staff did a roast, but Saturday, you cooked if you wanted something hot to eat. The staff were there to help you but you were sort of encouraged to cook yourself.

*What about bills and ...?*

Erm ... I didn't have to worry about my rent or anything like that because the tenancy wasn't in my name, so social services were paying for it. But yeah, I think that tells you the sort of disarray that the leaving care service was in, because I'd been in my flat about six months and I got told – I got a phone call telling me that they were going to start taking eviction proceedings against me because the leaving care team hadn't paid any of the rent. So I was like – I was roughly about £6,000 in arrears.

*Did you not get any support with that with your social workers and –*

Well yeah. It was one of these things that – I sort of went straight down to the office and my social worker wasn't there so I demanded to see the service manager. When I sort of said it to him, he was like, 'Hang on a minute, you should have been paid.' And it got, like – a phone call got made to the right department to sort of say, 'Look, we're paying it. The money will be, like, wired over to you in the next couple of hours, like the money is there, sort of thing.' So it was one of these ones to sort of –

but I sort of thought to myself, if I'm – like they're expected to help me and they can't even pay their bills [laughs]. Like ...

[1:05:35]

*At the age of seventeen, were you in education or ...?*

I was in college.

*You were in college. So how did you manage to balance living on your own and ...?*

I didn't. I sort of strolled into college as and when I could be bothered rather than sort of like – 'cause I started off, like, being – like living in a B&B when I started off at college, and then I sort of got my own flat. Yeah, I sort of – it was just one of these things where I just sort of strolled into college, 'cause I didn't have anyone to wake me up and I wasn't great at getting up myself, so I just sort of strolled in and eventually all the time I was missing put me behind in my work.

*So do you think that you – despite your, you know, the way you felt and how you felt – how independent you felt, do you feel as though subconsciously you did kind of need a parent?*

Erm, I suppose I did but ... I've got to think about the image I was sort of projecting at the time, so ... I didn't make it easy for anyone to help. But at the same time that's not an excuse for people just to sort of wash their hands off and say, 'Oh well, it's nothing to do with us.' So as much as I didn't make it easy, I do still think I could have been given more help and assistance.

*So when you first moved into your flat, was there any kind of support?*

I had – when I first moved in there was really bad – the flat was in quite a bad state of repair and I sort of had to go and get my – like get a solicitor myself and I had to sort of fight it myself. I suppose it was one of these things that – like once I took over the

tenancy, that's where my social worker didn't really sort of – wasn't as proactive as she could have been, because, like, I sort of was under the impression, oh well, I'm paying my rent now but this flat's in disrepair so I won't pay my rent, whereas ... I think had my social worker said to me, 'Look, although you've got this case going on against the council, you still need to pay your rent,' and sort of made sure I was aware of – 'cause when you're young you make decisions that you think are right or you can see that – the sense – the common sense in those decisions, but I think ...

*So do you think you were able to manage your finances and budget your money?*

I think I've learnt – like at the time I was gambling quite a bit, so that made managing my finances very up and down 'cause obviously some weeks I'd have lots of money to play with, other weeks I wouldn't have much.

[1:08:42]

*So you were gambling at the age of seventeen?*

I was gambling at the age of thirteen.

*Did no one ever pick up on that and ...?*

No, it was just – it was one – it was when I was living – well, it was when I was living at Tufnell House first time round. I was – started off when I was coming back late at night, I'd sort of be stopping off at the kebab shop and playing the fruit machine in the kebab shop. And then when I sort of was down in Somerset – I remember [laughs] three occasions when I was in Somerset, the staff actually took me to a – to an arcade, 'cause we sort of like went down to Lyme Regis and it was sort of like a – a beach sort of like touristy hotspot. So it had a couple of, like, seaside amusements in there and they actually had fruit machines, like 5p fruit machines, in there. The staff sort of – I remember for about an hour I had a member of staff talking to me while I was playing one of them. It was like ... [Laughs] You didn't think – he didn't think at any time to sort of say to me, 'Hang on a minute, you shouldn't be gambling on this. It's

like – we haven't come here for you to gamble. We've come here for you to sort of be amused.' But yeah.

*Do you think that arose out of boredom?*

Yeah, definitely. I think it arose out of boredom but I think it also arose out of the fact that when I first started I was making good money out of it. Like there were days when I sort of – like when it stepped up a bit and I started going into betting shops when I was, like, sixteen, and I was able to start, like, making money off the roulette machines. And, like, there'd be times when I could walk in with twenty quid and walk out with, like, two grand.

*And how – did that make you feel empowered and ...?*

Yeah, it made me feel like – when I'm sort of going [laughs] – I remember when I was at Tufnell House and I was sort of – I was like the loan shark, so to speak. It was like – 'cause we all sort of got our pocket money on a Friday. Come Sunday or Monday I'd always have, like, other residents going to me, 'Oh Dave, can you borrow me this?' 'Dave, can you borrow me that?' Because they sort of all knew that I always had money. Like that's why – they used to have this thing in my children's home where – in Tufnell House, where if you misbehaved you were put on one seventh, which meant your pocket money was split into – over seven days. Well, mine was £7 a week so mine was like £1 a day. Then they used to do supervised spending if you – that was another sanction you could get. So I remember one day I was – [laughs] I remember for a period of time I was on one seventh and supervised spending and I was like – so I had £1 a day but I had to go to the shop with a worker to spend that pound and I was like – and my key worker just said to me at the time, he went, 'How comes you haven't touched your pocket money for about six weeks?' And I just pulled out a bundle of twenties and went, 'I don't need to. Like I don't need to.' I went, 'You lot go and spend my one seventh if you want,' I went.

*So do you think that – do you think that the staff at the residential home, Tufnell House – do you think they kind of in a way helped you with dealing with your finances and learning how to budget?*

No, 'cause I think – I think – like that's one thing they commented on very quickly with me at Tufnell House is the fact that, like, we were sort of given money, then you were given toiletries money. You were given your clothing allowance. And I was always going out spending my clothing allowance every month and I was sort of always going out spending my toiletries allowance. And where you'd sort of have all the others sort of coming back with a can of Lynx and a bottle of shower gel and that's their toiletry allowance gone, and then I'm coming back with, like, boxes of toothpaste, shower gel, deodorant, aftershave, and it's like ...

[1:12:38]

*Have you ever thought of looking into getting your care records, or have you ever gotten them?*

Erm, I have but – I remember when a friend of mine done it and she was devastated because it was just like lots of blank pages, like lots of pages with big black boxes where a lot of the stuff was blanked out for data protection, and like it just didn't give her the closure she wanted.

*So you'd never feel –*

I've thought about it but it's always – it's always been one of these things that – I'm not sure there's a whole lot in there that I really need at this moment. It's not like there's – like for some people there's things that have happened in their past that they need answers to and they want to know – like that's probably something that my brother might want to do because, like, he won't know a lot about our care proceedings, but I will because I was there at every hearing. So I sort of think all the big things that have happened in my – within social services, like – I suppose the only thing that I might not know a lot about is, like, probably the first four or five years of

my life, but social services didn't get involved with me until I was, like, three, so I'm not sure there's a great deal my records could tell me that I don't – it sounds a bit big headed but there's not a great deal that they could tell me that I don't already know myself.

[1:14:06]

*Would you say that being in care has kind of – like, would you say being in care has kind of shown you, like, who you can and can't trust?*

Yeah. Like I always say to people – like I said – you used to get a stigma quite a bit and I've always said that, like, I might not have an Oxford degree or a Cambridge degree or, like, A levels, O levels, GCSEs and all that. I might not have tons of education or certificates to fall back on, but the one thing I have got is a degree in life. And that's what being in care done for me, it taught me what life was about and taught me that there are – there is a lot of pitfalls in life and you've got to be ready to sort of – yeah, if you've got a great support network then you've got that and that can always help, but you always have to sort of be ready to help yourself.

*You mentioned that you were always at your hearings and – etc. Were you ever at your reviews?*

Yeah.

*How did you find them?*

Erm [sighs], waste of time most of the time. It was – it was one of these things that I sort of – they were a waste of time in most respects, but towards the end I managed to make them work for me.

*How did you do that?*

Just by sort of being very forthright and going in there and knowing that I want a, b and c and not being prepared to take x, y and z. I was going to get a, b and c, so ...

*Do you think initially they were useless because you didn't have – you didn't have exactly – you didn't exactly know what you really wanted out of them?*

No, I think they – I think they sort of were useless because at the time I was very sort of hot headed, so I'd sort of – if you'd got a chair that sort of was quite pally with the social worker or sort of knew the social worker, then – and I think – like there'd be times when – quite a few of my reviews in the early days, I got kicked out of them because I sort of wasn't prepared to just sit there and, like, listen for the whole thing and be spoken to for a tiny little bit. And I think once I realised that the reviews should be geared around me to what I needed ...

*Do you think kicking you out of your reviews was a good thing?*

No. It just – it just ended up making – that game, me against them, it just made it even more – like things like that, things when I was put down in Somerset and sort of given the challenge of getting back to London, it was like ... things like that just didn't help. It just increased what I believed was the game at the time all the more.

*Why did you see being in care as a game?*

Erm [sighs], partly 'cause I didn't want to be there. I felt like I was sort of being taken away from what I believed was my normal life, but also because I don't think I ever had workers that sort of ... how can I put it? I don't think I had workers that geared the services I was getting towards me. Like, going back – Somerset would have been – classic example would have been, give me a – saying to me, 'Okay, you can have a travel warrant to come back to London every weekend.' Or, like, making it where – 'Okay, if you behave – like we'll send your mum down the first weekend of – of the month and if you behave the second weekend of the month we'll send you back up.' Like, give me a target sort of thing. Like when – the schooling that I was at, we used to do this points thing, so they could have just sort of said to me, 'Okay,

get over 150 points five days a week and we'll let you come to London for the weekend, or you can come to London for the day.'

*Did you ever voice these opinions?*

Yeah. I remember – as I said, like I came up quite a few times. And I remember the first time I came up and I sort of walked into my social worker's office on the Monday morning and she'd just walked in, like she was literally behind me, and I just turned round and went, 'Hello.' And she went, 'What are you doing here?' I was like, 'I come up.' She went, 'How?' She went, 'Who said you could come up?' I said, 'I left school on the Friday and I just jumped on a train.' And rather than sort of being like, 'Okay, wait there, I'll contact Sedgemoor. We'll organise getting you back.' It was like – I got the impression it was more of an inconvenience, like, oh, how dare you should be up here, sort of thing. It's like ... and it was more about punishing me rather than sort of like – it – like appreciating – it took quite a bit of an effort, getting up to London, like at the age of thirteen. It was like – well, I wasn't even thirteen at the time, I was probably still twelve, and it was like, rather than just appreciating, like, the effort that I'd gone through and what I'd managed to do ...

*How did that unappreciation feel?*

Erm, pardon?

*How did that unappreciation feel?*

Increased the stakes. Like, as I said, it was a game. From that minute on it was like, okay [laughs], I'll do it all the more. And then ... I think it wasn't until things got really bad at Sedgemoor that my social worker started to realise, like, just how bad – like, just how versatile I was and ...

*Did you ever feel like going – taking a different approach and maybe following their rules and ...?*

I did for a little bit of time, 'cause, like, in Sedgemoor College they had this thing where – they had a three stage, like, system, where if you'd done something wrong you were on stage one for two weeks. If you'd done something wrong again within that two weeks you were at stage two for a month – for three months. And then if you'd done something wrong you were on stage three for six months. And then the idea was, once you get to stage three, if you then do something wrong you get kicked out of the organisation, or your social worker gets told to find another place. You get sent to this – you get sent to one of the farms where you do twenty-eight days. And it's like – the idea is your authority gets twenty-eight days notice to find you somewhere else, but within that time, provided you haven't done something very serious, you then have the opportunity of working your way back in to Sedgemoor. And when my – I think when my twenty-eight days – when my twenty-eight days come, I think that sort of made my social worker sort of realise just how – when she's getting a phone call from them and being told, like, 'Right, here's his – we've just served him notice. He's off to the farm as we speak. You have twenty-eight days to find him somewhere else.' It's not exactly the best brochure to say to a prospective new carer, we want you to take someone on that's being served their notice as we speak, so ...

[1:21:55]

*How many social workers did you have?*

[Pause] I had six.

*Six in your two and a half years?*

Well, I'm talking about leaving care – leaving care as well. So in about – in about a six year period I had six social workers.

*So how do you think that affected your behaviour?*

Well, I think in one respect – like when I was actually in care under the age of sixteen I only had two social workers, so I can't blame, like, the change of worker. Like obviously I had a couple of temporary social workers while I was in care, but it was mainly two workers, I couldn't sort of like say it was 'cause I was getting loads of workers. But yeah, I don't think it helped.

*How did you feel their service to you was?*

As I say, I don't think they geared it very well towards me.

*All of them?*

Yeah. Like I think the last one did and I'm glad about that because I demanded my last social worker, so it was kind of like – I made a great decision but it – I didn't think it was at first. I made it and then it was like – a couple of months into it I was like, oh my good god, what have I done here, like I was like, David, you and your big mouth yet again. And it was like ... [Laughs] but no, it turned out that I made a really, really good decision and I was pleased about that decision because had I have not got that worker at that particular time, I don't – I don't know where I'd be right now. Like it's possible you could be having this interview in one of her majesty's prisons. It's a – it's a possibility, I can't get away from that. But yeah, I was lucky that I got – like, I felt vindicated, so to speak, because at – like when I was sort of given the opportunity to pick my worker, at that stage I picked the one that worked best for me.

*So what reason would you put behind the rest of the social workers' disservice to you?*

Again, like with some of the children's home workers, I think it was more of a job rather than a vocation. Like, my last social worker that I had, Janet, she – as I said, she was – I felt vindicated by asking for her. And I think that – she was good in the respect that, like, she really did generally care about not just the young people on her caseload but every young person who walked into the leaving care service. Like she

was probably on – on first name terms with probably ninety percent of the service users that came in and out of the building. Like she wasn't one of these workers that, when she was on duty you'd have to sort of explain your whole life story to her, because she'd sort of know a little bit about it already. It was a bit tiresome trying to get an appointment with her, but, like ...

*So why do you think there would have been social workers then? What would have been their motivation if they didn't care?*

I think there's caring and then there's sort of caring. Like, I think you can genuinely want to help someone but whether you're sort of prepared – I always say I think that the hardest job that – the best test for a social worker is when you get a young person, no matter what you're doing, they're throwing it all back in your face. Like you just can't do anything right. That's the best test, because if you can get through that person, like if you can get to the other side, then you're sort of – like, you're doing something.

*Did you ever do that? Were you ever that child?*

At times I was. Like, my first social worker, Sandy, I think that when I sort of went down to Somerset, as I said, it became more of a challenge with her and she could have offered me the winning lottery numbers and I would probably have still thrown it back at her. Because we had sort of entered a stage there where I felt it was a personal battle and it was just like I had to win it rather than – as I said, when I was at Sedgemoor, if I'd maybe just kept my nose clean, sat down, was a bit quieter and just sort of, like, played the game, so to speak ...

[1:26:48]

*Why would you – what would you pin the reason on as to why you were so aggressive and ...?*

I didn't want to be there and I just felt like – I suppose it's a bit like when you put someone in prison, they don't want to sort of like – no one wants to be there. So – and you've got some people that sort of just accepted they're there and make the best of a bad world and you've got others that are hell bent on sort of fighting.

*When you think back now, what would you change?*

Erm ... it's hard really 'cause there's things I'd change from different parts of my life. Like there's – there's things that I would change, but if you change one the rest won't happen, so it's difficult, really, to sort of like – as I said, I would have loved to have given Sedgemoor more of a chance 'cause I think – like, I do think if I'd given that a chance, if things had been – if things had been a bit more easier, made a bit more easier for me there, then that would have worked. Tufnell House, I wish I hadn't have left there in the first place because Tufnell done lots of really good work with me and then – the problem was Sedgemoor sort of undone – being at Sedgemoor sort of undone all that good work, because I sort of – when Tufnell House had got me from being out all hours of the night and sort of making money, doing this, that and the other, Sedgemoor sort of – I sort of had to go back to the old David and sort of utilise some of those skills to sort of be able to do what I did at Sedgemoor.

[1:28:34]

*Are you in touch with any of the staff from either Sedgemoor or Tufnell?*

Sedgemoor, probably – I don't really speak to any of their staff anymore. I think a lot of them have moved on now. Tufnell, I'm not even sure if the home is still – I know the house is still there but I'm not sure if it's still a children's home or not. For a while I kept in contact with some of them and all that, like I was always going back to see my old – my old key worker, who was the manager.

*Do you think that your experiences there have made you want to kind of become a staff?*

Become ...?

*A staff at a children's home.*

No, no. As much as I've got a lot to give, I just couldn't sort of like – [laughs] it's funny, I know I couldn't deal with a – with a young person like me, so ...

*You couldn't deal with a young person like yourself, but you ...*

I couldn't – I could deal with some aspects of a young person like myself, but, like, I just know that I wouldn't be geared to sort of dealing with the volatile aspects of a young person like myself, like the bits where it's sort of like a thankless task and you're not getting sort of like any thanks.

*Looking back now, would you say that parts of your behaviour was somewhat unnecessary?*

Yeah, I would.

*Why would you say that?*

Erm [sighs] ... because I think that some – some parts of it were just sort of like unnecessary. Like, as I said, when I was down in Sedgemoor, there was no need for me to sort of run away all the time. As much as I wanted to be back in London, I wanted to see my mum more, I should have maybe – there was another way of doing that. I could have voiced my opinions in another way. But I decided to do what I always do and think that I know the best sort of rather than ...

*You keep mentioning that you wanted to see your mum when you came back to London. Did your mum feel the same?*

Mm. Like she would – I wouldn't say help me as such, but – like, she never turned me away. Like, I remember one time I was coming up on the coach and I didn't have

the money for the coach, so I managed to blag my way onto the coach, because I said my mum was waiting for me at Victoria. So I got on my – on my phone and I said to my mum, ‘I need you to wait – I need you to be at Victoria to pay my coach fare when I get there because I’ve got on the coach without any money but they’re letting me go to Victoria because they – I said you’re there.’

*So how did that make you feel, to have her support – not necessarily support you but not be against you?*

Erm ... looking back on it now, I think had she have maybe sort of gone against me, it might have made things a little bit easier. Like if she’d said to me sort of the first time I came up – like, slammed the door in my face and not let me in sort of thing, then I would have sort of – I suppose if she’d rejected me then it would have been easier to sort of work with what I had. But then at the same time I’d have had a whole new sort of load of rubbish, so to speak, to sort of overcome.

*Did your mum ever try and get you and your brother back home with her?*

I think she did but it was never going to – it was never going to happen unless social services wanted it to happen, so ...

*Would you have liked her to try really hard?*

I think – I think she tried as hard as she could, but, like, it’s one of these things that – I think one – I think that’s what’s changed nowadays is the fact that social services are more open to family involvement and I think that, like, in my generation it was very much like, once social services had you in their clutches, they very rarely sort of like let you go, so to speak.

[1:33:20]

*So your experiences as a whole, they’ve kind of motivated you to do work with children.*

Mm.

*Could you kind of expand on the kind of work that you do?*

Yeah. Well, while I was at the Children's Active Involvement Service in Islington, I sort of – I got to help out on the blue team, which was like the – well, it was originally seven to eleven year olds. And then I was at the achievement day getting my – picking up a couple of awards for my involvement and this little kid – [laughs] this little kid, Jonathan, he come – he had a social worker that my brother used to have and she came up with him and he was crying his eyes out. And she went – like she knew me by name and all that and she, like, spoke to me and she said, 'He wanted to be up there getting an award like you.' So I just sort of got down onto one knee and I just went, 'Look,' I went 'You will' – I went, 'You will be.' I went, 'There's plenty of time for you to do it.' I went, 'It's only the old fogeys getting ours. You've got this to look forward to in a few years' time.' And he – like I made him laugh and all that and then I asked how old I was and I got told he was five. And I sort of went over to the manager of the CAIS at the time, Sharon, and went, 'Look, there's a five year old there. I think it would be nice to get him involved but I know we've got a bottom age limit of seven.' And Sharon sort of said to me, 'It's not set in stone. It can be lowered.' So we sort of lowered it to five. So Jonathan sort of got involved. And yeah, it was – it was nice to see the younger ones sort of like – it was nice to see the younger ones, like, flourish and see how some of them sort of – when they first came in they were very quiet, very shy and then within a couple of weeks – I just don't think the blue team went on long enough. I just don't think there was enough funding. I think it was a difficult thing to do because you had to pay for a lot of transport, carers had to wait around. So I think it was a great idea but there wasn't enough money for it and there wasn't enough resources for it, but what we – what we had, we made work very, very well. And then I got involved with mentoring through the Mayor's Scholars' Scheme in Islington, so that was another aspect where I got to sort of like work with – I wouldn't say troubled young people, work with some of the more challenging young people. That – that was really good.

[1:35:50]

*Could you tell me any memorable incidents that you had in any of your children's homes?*

[Laughs] Er ... memorable for what reason? Memorable positive or memorable negative?

*Positive.*

Erm ... I suppose the most positive one would be when I went to Sedgemoor. The deputy manager, Dennis, from Tufnell House was coming down with me because my social worker couldn't come. And my mum had turned up earlier than I thought she was going to be and he went, 'Oh, go down McDonald's with your mum for half an hour.' And I went, 'Okay.' So I went down and I come back and they'd thrown a massive surprise party for me. Like all the kids who were supposed to be at school had been brought back early and I sort of just walked in and they all jumped out at me. Yeah, it was nice to sort of have every – even people that I'd been fighting with the day before, sort of to be shaking my hand and – best of luck, hope everything works out for you. It was – it was nice but it made it a lot harder. Like it made leaving a lot harder, because I was happy there and I sort of – we'd gone through all the – we'd gone through all that sort of like initial stuff and we'd managed to sort of like – me being out late at night, we'd managed to get me sort of coming in at proper times and being indoors when I should have been indoors rather than being outdoors.

*How did you find bonding and making new relationships?*

Erm ... hard in some respects 'cause obviously I was so used to people coming in and out my life, so you didn't want to get too attached to somebody for them just to sort of not be there next week. So I think it's like ... I think it's sort of – knowing that someone is going to be there to sort of like ... it's not someone that's going to walk out.

*Is there anyone in particular or any people who you had attached to?*

Erm, I think at Tufnell House, the manager and the deputy manager, Carol and Dennis, I sort of like – Carol was like a second mum to me. She used to fuss round me like a mum – a mum would. Dennis, we just sort of used to – we could sit there for hours and hours talking about football and, yeah, we sort of like – I think Dennis knew that football was – I was really passionate about my football, you know. They identified that fairly early and I think he used that as a – a way of getting me to sort of interact a bit more and getting me to sort of like – not interact with more young people, but I think he realised that that was a tool that he could use to get me to sort of like fall into their sort of remit and their rules and sort of adhere to the house rules a little bit more than I – than I had at other placements.

*What about some of the bad memories?*

Erm, I think the worst one was when I was at Tufnell House and I'd just left Sedgemoor College and there was a female worker that worked in one of my houses for a couple of weeks when she started. Lovely woman she was, really, really kind, sort of would go out of her way to help the people that lived in the house and I really enjoyed sort of when she was on shift. And I'd just gone back to Tufnell House after leaving the other house in the group, Fairfax, and I found out that three boys who I used to live with in Sedgemoor had sort of – one night when she was on shift, grabbed her, tied her up, put her in the cupboard, then sort of broke into the house safe, nicked all the money [coughs]. Two of them had gone on the run and one of them was now back living at the other house in the group that I was living in and I just wanted to sort of like ... It was – it was hard to hear about it and hard to hear about someone that I had a great deal of respect for sort of being treated like that. And then when they moved him into my house, it was just ... fireworks.

*How did you respond to him?*

[Sighs] When they moved into Tufnell House I saw it as an insult because they sort of knew how I – when I was told about it, they knew how I felt, so ...

*Were there ever any incidents where you felt the need to complain about the staff?*

Erm, I think it was when – I think it was when my old key worker realised – when he realised I was – the one that, when he said to me about my pocket money, why I hadn't touched it, and I pulled out the notes. That night I come in and there was only supposed to be three members of staff on. There was four blokes. And I sort of walked in and they went, 'Come into the office.' And I went, 'Why?' And they went, 'Come into the office.' So I went into the office and they were like, 'Right, you've got money on you. Put it down on the table now because we've had enough. We're not having you sort of walking in and out of here, bundles of money on you. We've put you on one seventh for a reason. So whatever money you've got on you now will go into the safe and will be saved for you but you'll get it as and when we feel ...' And because I wouldn't I was sort of pinned down by four members of – by three members of staff, searched, had my mobile taken off me 'cause I couldn't prove where I'd bought it. I sort of had money taken off me. Yeah it was just – I just didn't like the way I was sort of treated. I felt like it was a massive overreaction.

*What did you do about this?*

Climbed out my window, climbed into the garden next door and then went back to my mum's, picked up a bag of clothes and then went and hid out at my mate's house for a couple of weeks, knowing that social services would – would tell – knowing the home would report me missing and, like, after a couple of days social services would have to start explaining what they're doing to try and find me.

*How did your mate take you staying with him?*

She found it quite funny, 'cause she lived literally just round the corner from where my home was so it was like ... and the police come there four times looking for me. It was like – 'cause she had a house – a flat on two – like her mum had a flat on two – on two floors, they'd – the police would be coming in the front door and I'd be sort of

jumping off the balcony and then coming back a couple of hours later, so. She found it quite funny.

*What about your friend's parents?*

I think her mum appreciated what I was like and she understood why I was doing what I was doing, but again I think she found it quite funny as well because, like, her and her family were very much anti police so it was like any sort of chance to sort of feel like they're getting one over on the police. And I think it was – it was quite funny to sort of think that, like, rather than the police just sort of going, 'Alright, one of us is going to stay out here,' sort of thing, they sort of like all went inside and it was – it would be literally, like, as the door would be shutting, I'd be jumping off the balcony. Like the amount of times that the police – I was, like, right in front of the police and they just ... there was even one time when I hid in the cupboard in the living room and it was like – there was a copper standing literally the other side of the door to me. If he'd just sort of turned round and gone, 'Let's have a look in here' – so I think it was quite funny.

*What about the relationship with your friend's mum, your friend's parents?*

Didn't really see them very often, so ... like –

*Were you with your friend very often?*

'Cause I was getting moved around so often, it was very hard to sort of like – she was an old school friend, so it was very hard to sort of like maintain a high level of friendship.

*Did you have any other friends that were willing to let you stay with them?*

A lot of their parents would have gone mad, but I was very – like, I was very much like – I was very good at utilising the tools I had, like – 'cause I was very knowledgeable about the buses. I used to spend quite a few nights on the buses. Like

if I wanted to abscond and – or if I wanted to run – if I wanted to stay out and I just didn't want the hassle, I just - sort of from Trafalgar Square, I'd get on the bus that went – the night bus that went to Gillingham, 'cause it'd take, like, nearly three hours to get to Gillingham. Like to go to Gillingham and back to Trafalgar Square would take near enough the best part of six hours. So I'd sort of just on there, go up the back, have a little snooze and no one would sort of trouble me, so to speak.

*Wasn't it tiring constantly running and hiding?*

It was and that's probably why I feel so tired nowadays [laughs], 'cause I sort of used up all my reserves then. But no, it was fun as well. A lot of it was adrenaline, like sort of at Trafalgar Square with all the people at the bus stop, like when you see a police car sort of – trying to sort of like duck out the way so it doesn't see you. It was adrenaline.

*No fear?*

I don't think – I don't think I really sort of like – I don't think I could really allow myself to be – to have a fear, otherwise ... I'd sort of like be dropping my guard a little bit and I'd sort of be allowing the authorities to have the upper advantage. So I couldn't afford to sort of have, like, time to be fearful because – thinking of it now, I probably did put myself in – in some dodgy situations.

*Female: Sorry to interrupt. I'm just aware that you're rubbing –*

Oh, sorry.

*Female: Is it alright if – 'cause it's making a little noise with the sound. Sorry about that. Thank you.*

[1:46:13]

*Would you – did you ever allow yourself to be vulnerable and just show another side other than ...?*

I think – thinking of it now, I allowed myself to get into some situations that I could have been quite vulnerable, but –

*Could you elaborate on them?*

Sorry?

*Could you elaborate on that?*

I just think, like ... I think the sort of areas that I was hanging around in, like Trafalgar Square, Soho, the West End, after midnight isn't the best place, like – and I sort of think some of the people that I was sort of associating myself with ... sort of weren't the best people.

*Do you ever think that there could have been another way of going about, you know, moving and – other than running and hiding?*

Erm, yeah, in hindsight there was. It was – like to work with the system and sort of just allow things to happen when they were supposed to happen rather than sort of – a lot of my moves were sort of made to happen because I got bored.

*At that time, what were you – what was going through your head when you were running?*

Erm ... I think ... it's just not allowing myself to – it's still – it still is that sort of game about – you can't allow yourself to, like, get caught. Like if the police catch you, you know you're going back to the children's home and I've got to go through all that, like the rubbish there, to sort of like have them give me a lecture about why I shouldn't be out so late.

*In hindsight, do you think that you – being in care was a waste of your youth or ...?*

Yeah. I think I – I wasted a lot of my youth sort of like – in respect it wasn't a waste because, as I said earlier, I sort of – I've sort of got that life qualification. I sort of will never be skint because there's always – the sort of Del Boy way, so to speak. Like I'll always be able to find a way of making a few quid, but yeah, I suppose I missed out on those sort of, like, teenage childhood-y sort of things you do, like sort of just playing – like playing computer games and, like, going to the pictures or whatever. I sort of missed out on a lot of that. But at the same time, I sort of always had money in my pocket.

*Do you think you wouldn't have lived a normal, you know, wouldn't have gained the life qualifications if you'd lived a normal life?*

No, I don't think I would have. I think ... I think I wouldn't have gained that but I think I would have gained other qualifications that would have helped me in life when a life qualification doesn't sort of help.

*Would you say you're ashamed of being – of having been in care?*

No. Not ashamed one little bit. It's happened. It's part of who I am. It's, so to speak, in my DNA and it's like ... It's something I'm very proud of.

*How has that helped you mould yourself into the person you are today?*

Erm, it's helped me because a lot of people – a lot of people want to – I know quite a few people that I grew up with in the system and want to play the victim and sort of like blame it all on – oh yeah, it was my social worker or it was the service or it was this or it was that. No, it was you as a person. Decisions you've made have contributed to you being in the situation – same as me, decisions I've made have contributed to me being in the position that I'm in. But it's not – it's about sort of – that's happened and life carries on. Like I can't go to the customer services and say

I'd like a refund and give me another go at life, that sort of – I have to just make the best of what I've got now.

[1:51:09]

*What about your – you and your brother, your – do you think your relationship would have been closer if you hadn't been moved into care?*

Erm, possibly, but I think – like my brother's always had learning difficulties so he's – like where I've sort of been, like, thirteen but the age of sixteen and he's been, like – at the same time he was, like, eleven but the age of an eight year old. So that sort of would have caused divisions anyway. So I just think there's – there's choices my brother's made in life that I don't agree with, I never will agree with him, so ...

*What about your hopes and your aspirations?*

They're very boring really in the fact – event that, like, have a – end up with a very good job, money in the bank, nice house, family. Like I don't want – I'm not one of these people that sort of wants to have this, that and the other. I'm not sort of very materialistic like that. I just want to sort of have a stand in life, really. Not a – nothing [laughs] – nothing too exciting 'cause I've had a bit too much excitement over the years, just – yeah, just normal.

*Do you think being in care has helped you to, you know, see what you want to do and what you want to become?*

Erm ... I think it has in one respect, but it has sort of – yeah, I think it's – it's a hard question really 'cause I think ... It's had its part to play.

*It's had its part to play in ...?*

Being in care has sort of led me down a path, so to speak, and, yeah, that path has sort of like – I can't turn back now and go back to the – to the crossroads, take a different

turning. I'm sort of on this path now and I have to – it's a bit bumpy but, yeah, it's – it's life. I think it'd be boring if it was a totally smooth – like we all got everything we wanted out of life. Life would be boring then. Nothing – the challenges make us stronger and they make us the person that we are.

[1:53:30]

*The day you got your – your leaving care flat, would you say you felt in control and free?*

Yeah. For once in my life I had somewhere where ... there was no rules. I was the rule maker. Like, no one could come in and tell me to do this, do that. No one could say to me, you have to do that, you have to do this. I was the rule maker. I was the one that –

*Did you never think that maybe the rules that were set for you were to help you? Or did you always see it as a –*

Erm, I suppose in one respect you could, but I think it was just – for me it wasn't – like, the core rules I was okay with. It was just the way they were implemented that was the problem. Like, so I just think it's a case of – like when I moved into my flat I made – like, my first rule was quite silly really, but I sort of made everyone but me take off their shoes in my – in my hallway [laughs]. And I remember my social worker saying to me, 'But you're wearing your shoes.' I went, 'Yeah, but it's my house. It's my carpet. I can do what I like with it. I can throw coke over it every ten seconds if I want to. It's my carpet.' [Laughs] So yeah, I think – I think it's the implementation of the rules that I had a problem with, not the actual rules themselves.

*How would you have changed those implementations?*

Erm, consider me a bit more in it, like spoken to me, explained it a bit more to me, rather than just sort of like – at times it felt like it was very much like, okay, here's the rules, like it or lump it.

*Could you give an example of some of those rules?*

Erm, well, when I was living in Sidcup, I was under the age of fourteen and you weren't supposed to go out without an adult when you were fourteen. So I – there was a funfair that I wanted to go to that was about ten minutes away from where I lived with my mum and I walked out the house and the staff were coming there and going, 'Oh, you're not supposed to be out. We're going to phone the police.' I was like, 'Phone the police.' And I was sort of like – got on the train. And they couldn't stop the train – they tried to stop the train from leaving but they couldn't. So then my social worker phoned me up and she was like, 'Go back there, you're not supposed to be out.' I was like, 'Look, I'm going to the funfair whether you like it or not.' Like, it was – it was something that I had planned to do before I went there, so – yeah. Just – I feel that was a rule that – the implementation of it – the rule was – yeah, thinking back, I suppose the rule was good to have, but at the same time ... I think, saying that a fourteen year old can't be allowed out on their own – well, I know fourteen year olds that shouldn't out on their own, but I know fifteen year olds that shouldn't be out on their own, but I know twelve year olds, like myself at the time, that – when I was twelve I had a mental age of a sixteen, seventeen year old, so – like I knew where I was going, I knew what I was doing, I knew what time I was going to be back.

*Did you ever think that – like, did you ever understand where the staff were coming from or did you always see it as an attack?*

No, I did in one respect, but I just felt that there was – there wasn't much sort of, like, scope for moving. Like, the rules were there, it was like they are there. There's no scope for sort of twisting them a little bit. Like a classic example would be when I was at Tufnell House. They had a PC and the rule was you weren't supposed to go on the PC after eight o'clock. I sort of got that – it wasn't lifted but it was twisted in the fact that Dennis, the deputy manager, said to me, 'If you stay in at night, I will let you stay on the computer till ten o'clock.' He wasn't letting me go to bed any later, I was still going to bed at ten o'clock, but it was just he put – he made it very, like, known to the staff, if he stays in after dinner, he can go on it at seven and be on it till ten,

knowing that then I wouldn't be up in the TV room sort of saying, 'Oh, I want to watch this, I want to watch that.' So that would be one young person less to worry about the TV room, but it was a way of keeping me indoors, because – and I was trying it a few times while I was there to then leave, but then that actually got took away and I was sort of told, 'Well, if you want to sort of play those games where you'll go out after – after you come off the computer then we'll take away the computer altogether.'

[1:58:44]

*Living in residential homes, what aspects would you have considered to be part of a normal life?*

Erm [sighs], dinner, when you all sit there at dinner, like all come in. Like dinner's on one big table, you all sort of just scoop up what you want and you're all sitting round a massive dinner table. It was just like having an extended family.

*Did you never get that when you were living with your mum?*

I did but not on the sort of scale that I did – like at Tufnell House there was always ten people living in there, so like at dinner time you had, like, ten residents, you'd have a couple of members of staff. Sometimes a few of the residents would bring their friends home from school for dinner. So you could sort of – at any one time you could have as many as fifteen people round the dinner table, all eating.

*How was the atmosphere?*

Erm ... it was difficult really 'cause, like, a lot – in the two times I was there, a lot of the young people there were, like, refugees who didn't really speak a lot of English, so they sort of would very much, like, come home from school, get changed and then they'd be sort of going out to meet with people from their own communities, because they could interact more, whereas if they stayed in the house they sort of wouldn't be able to – their level of English was extremely poor because they didn't plan to sort of

come over here, so they didn't sort of come over here fluent in English, so their level of English was very poor. So they would sort of rather interact within their own community because they would be able to interact more with people and sort of get more out of that rather than doing it in the house.

*Did you –*

*Female: Sorry to in interrupt but we had another hour there, so is it okay if we break for a bit here?*

Yeah.

[Pause in recording]

[2:01:01]

*So what would you say have been your primary feelings moving in between placements?*

Erm ... where's the nearest train station? [Laughs] Erm, I think there's a mixture, really. Like I think it depends why I was sort of – like there were some placements that I was glad to sort of be moving and there was others that I was unsure.

*What about when you were moving to your first placement?*

Erm, well, that was in – the first one [sighs] ... total anger, just didn't want to be there. Like, I had to sort of be taken there by the police 'cause my social worker sort of took my brother and I was sort of like so anti going there that – that I had two police officers sort of take me there and sort of – because they were so, like, worried that I would either run off or that I was just going to sort of – they wasn't – because they knew I just didn't want to be there, they wasn't sure how I was going to sort of like ...

*How was that whole experience for you?*

Erm ... hard really 'cause at home I sort of – everything stayed exactly the same except from the – I was sort of not living at home with my mum. I was still going to the same school. Like the only advantage to it was that they were paying my travel, so when I got to school I was able to get the little 40p bus tickets, keep them for myself [laughs].

*When you were going to school and you'd moved from home to a residential home, how – how was it like being at school? How were the children?*

Erm, a lot of them didn't really know, to be honest with you. Like the teachers knew but the teachers were just sort of told by my social worker more because they knew that it was going to be increased journey time for me. Like my journey was going to go from being half hour to an hour and a half. Yeah, they just – I think they didn't really sort of grasp what had happened, like I didn't tell anyone.

*Did the teachers treat you any differently?*

Erm [sighs], I think they were – I think they were more alert, like they were sort of like – where if I walked in late I'd sort of have to get a speaking to and I'd have to stay behind afterwards and explain why I was late, it was just sort of like allowed, like I could stroll into a class an hour late and it wouldn't be a case of, 'Why are you late?' It would be a case of, 'See me afterwards. I'll tell you what you missed.' And it'd be like ...

*Did you ever feel as though you wanted your teachers to care more?*

Erm ... I think, looking back at it now, I don't think there's anything they could have really done that – at that time I didn't really want – like I wasn't a big one for pity or sympathy, so I didn't want anyone to sort of sympathise to my situation. I didn't want anyone to pity me for my situation. So ...

*Do you think maybe one of your teachers could have been an advocate for you?*

Erm ... I think it depends, really. I know – like, Robert Blair wasn't really that sort of like – 'cause it was a pupil referral unit so it wasn't really a sort of school as in proper school school. And I think all the young people there had issues of some sort that – I think the teachers had more than enough to cope with [laughs] before – without me – I think quite a few of the kids there were in care anyway, so it wasn't sort of like – I think it was more normal for them than it would be for normal school, 'cause they probably had, like, thirty or forty kids there and you're probably talking about fifty percent of them were probably in care, maybe even more. Whereas, like, in a normal school you might only have, like, ten in – within, like, 300, so ...

*How did it feel going back to school, like being around normal surroundings and normal environment?*

Erm, I never actually went back to proper sort of normal school. Like, when I left Robert Blair I went to Sedgemoor, that was very much sort of like their own in house education. And then when I come back to London I got home tutoring. So it wasn't until I went back to college and then obviously it's totally different to school because you're expected to sort of put a lot more effort in yourself rather than it being done for you, so ...

*So you essentially missed quite a big chunk of your secondary years.*

And it's social services I blame for that, not – I don't blame anyone else but social services, because for years I was telling them that I could handle mainstream school and they were – and they were just agreeing with the education service that, no, I couldn't. And then when I went back to college, I handled – like, to do my GCSEs, it was only that I damaged my knee a couple of weeks before the exams - but my attendance was about eighty-five percent. I didn't – I wasn't in problems with any of the other students, so I proved that year back at college that I could have handled mainstream education had I just been given the opportunity.

*What was social services' reasoning for it?*

I think then it was very – the problem was the agencies worked separately, so it was like social services, education. I think nowadays they're very much linked. They're interlinked. So it's like you wouldn't – I don't think that problem would be as much now because they're sort of on the same floor, same building sort of thing, whereas then it was very much like – it was them against us, sort of thing, for them. It was like – I don't think a social worker wanted to tell the education welfare worker that – yep, I'm pressurising, he should be back in school. Just like I don't think the education welfare worker wanted to start telling the social worker where to put me, so. I think they both had jobs to do and they didn't really want to step on each other's toes.

[2:07:50]

*How did it feel being let down by so many organisations, so many services, that are meant to be helping you?*

[Sighs] I don't think I made it easy, but I think it was – it's sort of what I came to expect. That's why I think, like, when I started – like when I got involved with CAIS, when I started getting involved with Shaftesbury, when I started getting involved in the mentoring, it – it sort of – I think it was nice to sort of be around people and agencies that sort of respected what I had to bring to the table [clears throat] and could sort of like utilise my skills more.

*Do you think maybe you – your expectations are a bit too low of social services and the education system?*

I think – I won't hide the fact that I think they – they both failed me. They both like – social services failed me in the respect that when they took me into care they said – to take me into care, they said to the judge, 'We can look after this person better than the care they're getting at the moment at home.' Well, I proved they couldn't because I was doing exactly the same in care as I was doing out of care, so they couldn't. And I think they didn't stand up to the education authority like they should have and I think

the education authority didn't notice that actually – I think that's where things have changed now because it was very much like – in those days you were sort of tarnished with a mark and it was like – very much like going back to when, like, we used to have orphanages and, like, in Ireland when you'd have kids numbered. It was like once you'd had your number that was it, sort of thing. It was very much like that in the fact that once you were tarred with a brush ... like I could have – once I went to Robert Blair Pupil Referral Unit I could have stayed going through these special schools, as they like to call them, but it wouldn't have done me any good. I'd have just – I reckon I'd have actually come out worse by going to them than by not going to them.

*Looking back now –*

*Female: Sorry, just to let you know you've got five more minutes.*

[2:10:12]

*Looking back now, what would you tell a twelve year old you as you go into care for the first time?*

Erm ... it depends. Depends on the circumstances, depends on – but I'll tell them, never be scared to open your mouth. Never be scared to use that voice that you have, because there's very little that you – at that age, there's very, very little that you actually have in the system. But never be scared to use it 'cause that voice – your rights. Like when I was – when I was twelve, rights were something that was in a book. It wasn't really something that was – it wasn't sort of actively, like, trying to get – like the NSPCC was only just starting to get all their stuff up, so it was like – I think rights were something that was there but it was like in a training manual rather than ... so I think I'd say to a young person, make – never be scared to use your voice and always make sure you know your rights. And never be scared to challenge decisions that you're not happy with. And to the system, I would say that ... I think we've got to be careful about ... we've got to be careful about making sure that the workers that are doing a great job out there, 'cause there are a lot of them, that we

don't bog them down too much and make it where they're just like, you know what, let me go and do something else because I'm wasting my time. So I think the workers that are good – but the workers that are just sort of bumming along, so to speak – I think every authority owes it to their young people to siphon these people out and either develop them as workers or show them the door.

*How would you sum up your whole care experience, in a sentence?*

Rocky road [laughs], rocky road cheesecake. So many – so many ingredients and the title says it all. No, erm ... bit of both. I think there's been some good times, there's been some bad times, but I think the – the phrase rocky road sort of says it all. It's rocky but it's a journey I've enjoyed. It's – it's made me the person I am. I don't think – like, without that experience, I don't think I'd be the person I am today. Just like without my weight, I don't think I'd be that person. I'd be a totally different person. So I think that there's a lot of things that have happened that have sort of made me who I am. And yeah, it's happened and it's a case of working with what I've got now.

*Is there anything else you'd like to say?*

No, I've enjoyed it, so ...

[End of Transcript] [2:13:32]