

Care Leavers' Stories project

Khadija Sekhon

Interviewed by Camelia Borg

C1597/02

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Social Care Institute for Excellence

Interview Summary Sheet

Title Page

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Collection title: Care Leavers' Stories

Interviewee's surname: Sekhon

Title: Miss

**Interviewee's
forename:** Khadija

Sex: Female

Occupation: Student Social Worker

Date of birth: 1988

Dates of recording: 23.04.13

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**Interviewer's
comments:**

Track 1

So hi Khadija. I'm Camelia, as you know, and today we're going to be talking about your care experience and other experiences that you've had. So to start off with, I'd like to ask you about – what are you involved in at the moment? So what kind of things are you doing at the moment?

I'm – first of all I'm a student at Brunel University. I'm a first year student, doing a social work degree. I'm also the mother of a five year old child and I'm a carer for my mother as well. So yeah. And I'm also working for Hammersmith and Fulham Council as a – I'm an agency worker, as a residential support worker. So I'm supporting disabled children with learning disabilities.

Very busy lady then.

Yes.

Yeah. So we'll focus on the first thing that you said. So you're a student.

Yes.

So what is it that you're studying at the moment?

I'm doing my degree in social work. That's the first year. But to get to university I did the access course last year. So it's been a year. So it's coming to the end this sort of June.

And how are you finding it at the moment?

It's been a journey. It just feels – it feels like it was years ago that I sort of started and the year's just gone by so quickly in terms of sort of working and then you've got – and I've got childcare responsibilities and then my mother. So it's been hectic. But I mean, I'm so far so good. I've done really, really well in terms of the first time I got

my grades back and I got all As, so that's something I'm really, really proud of. And also I'm a first time – I'm the first person in my family to be going to university, so I've sort of set myself up that I want to do well so I can set sort of an example for my son. So yeah.

Oh, that's good. That's good. Where did you – with the course, was it something that you've always wanted to do?

No, 'cause when I was in care I went on to do nursing for a year but then I fell pregnant with my son and I sort of realised that that's not where I've – my heart was at, sort of thing. I thought it was where I wanted to be when I was younger, obviously, but then a lot of my social workers used to say to me that I'd make a good social worker. And so I sort of explored the route – so I did a lot of work experience, voluntary work, etc, so just to get the gist, is there where I sort of really want to be, because obviously the fees being so high, you want to make sure you're on the right course and not just drop out. So that's how I sort of knew that that's where I wanted to be.

[2:43]

Yeah, that's good. And how have you found studying and caring for your mother and working and also having a child? How have you found kind of – how have you found it? How have you balanced things?

It's been hard. I'm not going to lie. It has been really, really hard. But my support networks are absolutely incredible. Even though, as I say, I'm a carer for my mum, I'm a sort of – obviously she needs help with her shopping and support and stuff, but she also helps me in terms of, like, looking after my son. And my brother's there as well. He's younger than me, he's twenty-two. He helps me with my son, so. Because they realise that obviously I'm providing and I'm doing a lot so they're going to have to sort of help me. But there's been times when there's been arguments or when there's been fights, quarrels, I don't want to do this, but then I sort of really have to explain to them that if you want me to do well and get sort of a good future

with this, well, I'm going to have to start from somewhere. Because my mum's not educated, she doesn't speak no English and she's been in the country for twenty-five years. It's quite a lot. So she realised the importance of education. So she's really supported me. So yeah, so the end goal is just to wait for the graduation.

Okay. And when is it that you will be graduating?

In 2015. A long way to go but that's what I sort of just keep seeing every day, that that's where I want to go, so there's not going to be anything stopping me now to get there. So yeah.

[04:13]

That's good. You mentioned that you have a brother.

Yes.

How many other brothers or sisters do you have?

My mum got remarried when we were in care and then I got two younger siblings, an eight year old and seven year old, but they're in care as well in Luton, which was a very long battle with social services. But then I sort of had to sort of decide for myself – because I was given the chance to basically look after them but then not look after my mum. Because I had – when I left care obviously I was given a property, a one bed property, and they said to me that basically – I went to their assessments and stuff, so they said to me that I can keep – I can get responsibility for my two sisters but my mum can't stay with us, because she didn't pass her side of the assessments.

Right, okay.

So it was quite emotional. But then I had to sort of really step out the box and think that I've got my own child. Where's my mum going to go? So I sort of had to say that they're going to have ... Sorry, excuse me, have to go into care. Obviously if

things change for myself in the future, maybe I might look at getting them back. But they're in a good family. So I made sure that whatever needed putting in place was in place for them too. So yeah, we have contact on – I have six contacts a year and my mum has four. So yeah, so that's where we are.

That's a big decision for you to make, a big thing on your shoulders. Who was there to support you throughout that time?

Nobody really. But I mean, it – I sort of really had to think that, what am I going to be able to give them in the long term in terms of their future. Because obviously my future's been messed up as it was and do I really want them to suffer. And financially I wouldn't even be able to support them and where am I going to go with my own life? Once they're older, okay, they'll get into education if that's where that sort of life takes them, but then where do I go in terms of my own future is another question. What am I going to do when I'm forty or something and then I've got nothing to sort of – no education to hold back onto, sort of thing. So yeah, so I had to sort of think of all the pros and the cons and it just weighed up that it would be better for them maybe to just go. And we still see them. They still know that I'm their sister. Obviously it's a journey that they're going to have to go through as well, but I've just tried to make it hopefully a positive one rather than a negative one for them. So yeah.

And how do you find the contact sessions that you have, the six sessions that you have a year where you go to see them?

I haven't had my individual contact sessions yet because it's just been so hectic. So I tend to just go on the ones that I'm with my mum and my brother and my son obviously. We all go and see the girls. Because I've also been a contact supervisor as well, so I've been in the role where you supervise the contacts as well. It's quite a rigid – it is horrible. I think it's very, very horrible because, like, last contact we had, two weeks ago, it's my older sister, the eight year old's – she's going to be nine actually. It's her birthday in June, so I wanted to take them to Chessington. But it's like, they're not going to agree to it because the hours are long and they – it can't be supervised as such because you're going to be going on the rides and etc, etc. So it's

quite a tight process. There's not much you can do in terms of – it has to be agreed by them in the end. It's them that make the final decision of whether we can or can't go, which is kind of horrible, I think. But I think, as they get older, maybe then we can do a little bit more. But because they're young there's not much that we can really do. So yeah. But they've been good because my mum – it's a long, long history. It's like history repeating itself – but because it's me and my brother and then there's two girls, my younger siblings. My brother was always the pampered one out of me and my brother and it was history repeating itself in terms of my two younger sort of sisters. The older one didn't get the love and affection and the younger one does. And that still shows. It's like a vicious cycle still repeating itself throughout contact. You can still see that the young one plays up and Mum's spoiling her and the older one doesn't get that love and attention. And she's going through a very hard time. And I think they were saying they were going to refer her to CAMHS. But she's doing really well though so far. She's sort of changed in the last month or two in terms of her behaviour and stuff so they've sort of postponed it. But what they did say is that if she gets back to being sort of challenging then they might have to do that referral again. So I just feel – I can feel that – it's like I'm her and my brother's the other young one obviously, but they're just two girls and me and my brother were a boy and a girl. So yeah. But she – you could tell from my sister, she looks to get attention from my mum but it just doesn't come. It's quite sad but it is what it is. So yeah.

[09:11]

Yeah. Just to clarify, because some people might be watching this that don't kind of understand quite as much, could you just clarify what CAMHS is? You mentioned that would be referred to CAMHS.

It's Child Adolescent Mental Health Service, provided for under eighteens, I believe. So it's something that – you have mental health for older adults but then some – these are for the younger children. And they obviously specialise with a lot younger children and do all, like, psychological and emotional and all them sort of needs.

Thank you.

You're welcome.

[09:48]

*You mentioned that it's – you can see the cycle. It's like history repeating itself.
When you're there in that situation and you see it, how does it make you feel?*

I think I've closed off now. I've – I can really see my mum making an effort. So I'm going to give her that credit, I'm not going to take that away from her. She really is trying to make a change. But then I also feel grateful for my sisters, not to be big headed, but to say that they've got me now in terms of that support, whereas me and my brother had nobody. Nobody understood. Obviously we were amongst – me and my brother were amongst very few Asian children at the time we were taken into care and Asian children aren't – especially Indian children, it's sort of looked down upon in society if they're taken into care. So they're sort of very lucky in that term because, like, they've got me and my brother who've been through there. So they can always come back and talk to me and they've got the support, whereas I had nobody to turn to. So in that terms they're lucky. Obviously it ain't going to compensate for the love and affection that she – my younger sister wants from my mother, obviously, but she's got me in terms of that support if she ever needed it. So yeah. I do try and tell my mum but then it just goes – she goes all stroppy. Because she suffers from bipolar, my mum, hence to why she sort of didn't pass her assessment, because she stopped taking her medication. She – and that's the only thing that social services held against her when we were into court. Because I attended court for two – over a couple of months with my mum and I was sort of – they agreed for me to be part of the – what do you call it, the overall court proceedings. So I was allowed to actually go in court. Because sometimes they don't allow extended family members to come in, it's just the person that has a case. That's the only thing that they've really held against my mum. So if she – hence if she had been taking her medication, she could have got the girls back. So I'm – she regrets it now. But she went really, really downhill where it got to a point where she was accusing me of taking her money.

There were safeguarding issues. All sorts of things happened at that point of time. But I mean, I held strong and I had to sort of be strong for her. Because I know what it's like when she stops taking her medication. She's a completely different person altogether. Either she's really high or then she goes really low, but this time she was really, really high. So yeah, so that's where it sort of went after – sort of with her.

[12:22]

Okay. During the time when you were in court, how did you find that whole experience? You said that you stayed strong, but kind of how did you find – how did you –

Even though I say – I did say strong, I had to go up into the witness box. I've never, ever been into a witness box in my whole entire life. I got very emotional. It came to a point where I was actually literally crying. And you just felt all these professionals looking at you. You felt like a right idiot, sort of thinking, okay, they're all looking at me but those are my – that's my sister's life. And I had to be strong by them. I had to really – it got to a point where the interpreter – my mum had an interpreter, which – I complained about her in the end because my mum, being my mum, but a professional should be a professional and the interpreter sort of said, 'How can your daughter do that to you?' to my mum and it felt like my mum now is a – like complete – we're in sort of oppositions as such, where she sort of really brain – started brain feeding my mum, saying, 'Your daughter's mean. How can your daughter do that? How can your daughter not decide that she wants to take them?' But she had no idea of what it was like for me. And I – I told the social workers that that's what happened, because my mum came back and told me. And that's the thing that professionals understand, family will always be family. So you go and try and do something – obviously my mum's going to be my mum, she came back and told me what she's been telling her. And it was kind of really disappointing because she never knew what I was going through, how much is on my shoulders, and yet for her to sit there and judge me and to say these things to my mum. So it felt like I was in a battle against my mum at that time. I still haven't told my mum – she knows that I've got extra time with the girls and I can go and see them whenever I want, but I haven't told

my mum yet when I'm going to be seeing them. And I don't think I will tell them – tell her either, because she gets very, very emotional and she still feels like I'm more of their mother than she is their mother. So there's always been that battle as well against my mum. Erm, in court it was – it was just – it's an experience I'm never ever going to forget, let's put it that way. I sort of had to think out of the box and think for my sisters rather than just be selfish and think for my mum and myself. And I had to really think about their needs rather than my own needs and what I wanted at that time. And it was really hard because my heart was just telling me, bring them back home, but then the reality is, what am I going to be able to give them in terms of their future. I won't be able to – where's my mum going to go? Because she's got no extended family here, nobody talks to her, so her only support is myself. And my brother's sort of there but not as much. So in terms of her finances, in terms of mortgage, bills, all of that's been on my shoulders since I was a – at the age of twelve, thirteen. So you can imagine, my mum does nothing besides sort of cook and clean and just maintain herself. In terms of everything else, the bills, from looking after the house, the maintenance, the keeping, it's all down – down to me, to make sure shopping's done, things are put in place. So that's all been on my shoulders from, like, the age of twelve, I think, twelve or thirteen, yeah. So – and even contact now, she wouldn't even be able to get to Luton. She doesn't even know how to get there. So I take her. So if I'm ill – 'cause I've had to cancel one contact and a social worker was asking, 'Can your mother not go on her own?' And I go, 'How will she get there?' So I have to make sure that I am consistent and I take her and ensure that things have been put in place for her. But yeah, the professionals, they supported me, I must say. The social worker's got a very good relationship with myself. But I think obviously, being a professional, you've got to keep the boundaries, isn't it? There's only a certain amount that you can and can't do. So yeah. It is what it is, hey?

[16:20]

You mentioned that the professionals supported you. What kind of support did they give you?

They – they sort of said to me that I made the right decision in terms – for the girls. They go, okay, it's taken your time to understand that but you've really come on really, really well. And they obviously understood my own experience. They were really, really supportive. And in terms – because what happened is because – even though – at that time I think they were five and six, the girls, so it's been about a couple of years now since they've been in care, they were something – no, it was four and five, they were four and five, and they wanted to go for adoption. And initially I was totally against the idea. I'm like thinking, no way, not adoption, if anything it will be long term fostering. But then they really sort of gave me the other side of the story of being adopted and how it would be better for them, because obviously social workers won't be involved and they'll have a permanent sort of family that they can be with. And what they did say is that we could still have two contacts a year face to face. So normally it's letterbox contact, where you have no – you're not allowed to see the family obviously until you're older but you can post letters through social services and they will give them to the child and vice versa. But we were quite fortunate for them to even say that we could have two contacts a year face to face. But I was thinking that would be really, really good. Because I was thinking long term, imagine not having social services – because you know you have your LAC reviews, which is looked after children reviews, then you've got your social worker still coming on your case, coming and checking how you are, making sure things have been put in place. You have your dentist, your eyes, all of that sort of stuff. So yeah, I remember having all of that. So I was thinking maybe it might be better for them in that term not to have social services involved for the rest of their life. They know that they belong to a family. Because my experience, I will probably go onto afterwards, you'll probably ask me anyways, is a mixture of both good and bad. So I was thinking maybe it's better for them stability wise to have a family that they can say that that's my family as well. So in a way they've got two families rather than one. So yeah.

[18:24]

Okay. I'm just going to go back slightly. Obviously you mentioned about your brother, how he doesn't – you said he – he doesn't have quite as much as an active role in supporting like your mum as what you do. Why do you think that is?

I'm not really sure. He – even though he doesn't say it, he's got much stronger – I think he more thinks of me as a mother – motherly figure than my mum. Me and him have got a very good – sort of good relationship and we have since we were little. It – because of the fact that I don't – I think he still doesn't understand her illness and he never did. And it took me until the time she broke down in 2000 – somewhere – I think two, three years ago, I think I was nineteen – no, no, no, older than that actually. They got taken – I think it was two years ago, not last ... was it last year? Yeah, last year, January actually, sorry. Last year, January, where my mum broke down and that's when I really came into term – so I'm twenty-four, twenty-three at that time, came into terms of understanding my mum's actually really, really ill. Up until that point I really didn't understand that – I just used to think that she's sort of blagging it, like she's alright, there's nothing wrong with her. She's sort of talking crap and she's just faking and stuff. But I really, really saw the side effects of what she was like when she felt ill in that time. And I really came to terms with it and accepting it, that that is part of her now. And I don't think my brother still comes into – has come into terms with it. Because even then it was me being on the professionals' case to try and get her sectioned. Because she did so many weird things, she got a knife out and she's got a thing about putting fires and stuff – because we were in the States as well – I've been in care in the States as well with my dad and my dad's in America still. So even then she – when me and my brother got taken away there, she put logs into the oven to try – because the houses aren't made out of brick, they're made out of wood, and they – and she set the whole house on fire. And luckily it didn't catch down to the whole street. So they called an ambulance, the fire brigade, and they arrested her and took her down.

Where was that, sorry?

In America.

In America?

Yeah. And even so, coming back here now, relating it to here, she did – she tried doing the same thing, tried to set the house on fire. She got a knife out in a temple, a Sikh temple, and amongst eight women, said, ‘I’m going to stab each and every single one of you.’ And said to her, I – because you know because of the cuts, they don’t realise that she needs to be sectioned. They tried working with her in the community as they – you know with the Community Care Act? They try to work with clients obviously in the community to avoid hospitalisation. But I said to them – even her CPN, which – she’s known her for twenty-five years and she’s still her CPN, which is the community psychiatric nurse. She said to the professionals, ‘She needs to be put in hospital.’ But they did not agree. It took a whole month for us – for me to battle day in and day out, ringing them every single night, every single day, ‘She’s not come back, she’s doing this, she’s doing that,’ before they actually sectioned her into hospital. So that was a battle in itself. Because I knew she’s not – she is vulnerable. She’s vulnerable and she’s not – on top of that, she’s not sort of safe for the community that she’s in. Because she was doing all sorts of things like – I wouldn’t even want to say on camera, but doing things that she shouldn’t have been doing. And it was absolutely crazy. But that in itself was just an absolute battle with the professionals, trying to tell them that, look, she needs to be in hospital, she is not safe. And obviously contact was stopped then between – because when we had contact she was off her medication, I took her thinking that she’ll be okay, because I didn’t really want her not to see the girls. But she attacked me in Argos in Hounslow. People were looking. She scratched me, pinched me, swore at the contact supervisor. I had to sort of restrain her in Argos, people all looking, and it was just absolutely embarrassing. Told her contact supervisor, ‘Take the girls and run.’ And she attacked me, pulled my hair and I – she sort of got out of my hands and ran after them, but luckily the contact supervisor took them in the car. The girls obviously didn’t understand why Mum was behaving the way she was. She swore at the another contact worker, saying, ‘Are you their mother?’ This, that and the other, ‘Do you know better than I do?’ It was crazy, absolutely crazy. I’ve even forgotten about it but just thinking – like, talking about it, obviously now it’s just ringing bells. It’s just absolutely nuts. So that was an experience in itself. But yeah. So – but my brother, I

don't know why he doesn't take an active role. I really don't know. But maybe – I think he holds a lot of grudges against my mum in general. I think he sort of blames her for not being there for him when he was a child, obviously. He was a mummy's boy. So I'm not sure. He's never had any responsibility put into his hands or – so he sort of knows, my sister's there, she'll do it, sort of thing. So he just wants to enjoy life and just do what he wants to do, be a typical boy, I think. But so – and at the moment I don't feel safe handing responsibility over to him as well. Because I think he still needs nurturing. So in a way I still look after him as well indirectly, just to guide him. And even just to do household chores. He won't listen to my mum, so I have to tell him, 'Go and do this and go and do that.' So yeah. Because we all live together, so me and my mum, my brother and my younger son. So yeah [laughs].

[24:17]

Okay. You mentioned earlier that you've kind of almost become the mothering figure. You – you know, everybody kind of looks to you. Throughout your childhood and even now, do you have any role models yourself that you can – you look to or – you know, whether it's a friend or perhaps even, I don't know, a celebrity? You know, do you – have you had any role models throughout your life that you've looked to?

I have but not anymore. I am who I am and I'm going to make – I feel like I'm going to set the example now for whoever comes sort of in my – obviously my own generation. But my last foster carer was an absolutely amazing, amazing figure. I mean, she – she's still in touch with me and we still speak now. I must say that I sort of – it got to a point where we weren't talking. But I don't know, even though she's always said that I will be family – but it never feels like that once you've left care. It's never ever the same. I mean – but we're still in touch. She pushed me. She's always believed in me. She's always had confidence in me and she goes to me that, 'You'll do well in life.' And even her extended family always took me on as part of being a family. There never ever was a point when the other – because there was all women in that household at that time. So it was my foster carer, her older daughter, I think she was twenty-six or twenty-seven at the time, a sixteen – and I was fifteen and a younger one, who was fourteen. So I was in between the two younger ones. So

yeah, we're all sort of in touch. I went to my carer's graduation. She graduated and she was, like, forty something, forty plus. So she's really set the scene for me in terms of – education has no age, so you can do it at any point. So she's done really well. Because she split up with her husband. She's raised her children and managed to pay for their university fees. She's got a house of her own. So it just shows that if she can do it, what the heck, I can do it, sort of thing, as well. She was an absolute brilliant, brilliant foster carer. She – she's really pushed me, I think, into sort of just continuing on with education and to getting there and doing well. Even though we're not in touch as much – but I've spoken to her a couple of weeks ago, so we're sort of – just to touch base on where I am, what I'm doing. And yeah, so she's sort of been a really good, positive role model, I think. But I always – I love talking, so I love talking to everybody, but I do learn lots of different things from different people, even though they might not be in my life for a long time. But I find it – because I split up with my husband, I find it very hard to sort of trust people because of what's happened in my own relationship. So I sort of just give as much as I think they need to know basis. Don't really like people coming into my own personal, personal life, as such, at the moment. Hopefully it might just change when time goes on but not at the moment. Yeah, so ...

You said obviously that your last foster carer was a good role model for you but now you want to – I can't think of the exact words that you said, but basically, you know, kind of make it your own now. Is there anybody at the moment that you kind of look to or you think, right, that's the kind of thing I want to go down, or that's the kind of route I want to follow? Is there anybody that's had an impact on you since foster care?

Yes. When I went with my – de, de, de, de, de. When I was going to court with my sisters, my court proceedings, there was the CAFCAS worker, which is – I'm not sure what it exactly stands for but I know that they're guardians that are appointed by the courts. So I'm sort of really planning on heading down that route after I've qualified. I want to work as a social worker for a couple of years, because you need the experience, and then hopefully to become an appointed guardian by the court for children and then just advocate for children. And I think that would be probably

better because you're not really getting entangled into the family side, you're solely looking at – it's what is the interest for this child and for their future, and that's where I want to sort of be towards the ending. But I don't know, let's see where it goes.

[28:45]

So do you feel that your past experiences have had a big impact on you and they've kind of shaped the direction of your future, is that –

Absolutely, absolutely. Because even when I went for my university – because, of course, you can't go into it just like that, you have to go for interviews – I got all four of the places at universities that I went to for my interviews. You have to do a written test, which you have to pass, but then when you do talk to people and go for your interviews, you talk to them and you tell them why – the first thing they ask you is, 'Why do you want to be a social worker?' And I tell them straight up that, 'Listen, I've been in care. I've been at the grips of everything that you can basically – a young child can be thrown with. So – hence to why probably eighty to ninety percent of the reason why I want to do – why I'm on the course is because I've been there and I want to make that change. And hopefully not history – sort of let history repeat for the ones that it's happening to at the moment. Obviously you get your good carers and you get your bad carers. And even some of the social workers, some were good, some were – some were not. So just make a difference to the ones that are in the system at the moment and sort of make it more of a positive experience rather than a negative experience.' So yeah, so I think obviously it has a very – because I know the system, been there, sort of gone through it, and still am part of the system because of my sister still being there, that battle with the professionals still goes on, doesn't it, in a way? So sort of that had a huge impact into reasons why I've sort of wanted to become a social worker.

With your son – sorry, did you say he was five?

Yeah, he's five.

He's five. Obviously not having your – your husband there present, how have you found kind of – what have your coping strategies been in terms of having a son, looking after your mother, having your brother there? How have you kind of coped?

I'll start from scratch. When obviously – I was quite young when I had my son. I think I was nineteen. Social services – my case was still open to social services, so they wanted to come and do assessments. They wanted to come and make sure that I was a capable mother because I've been in care and I might not be able to look after my son. I felt really angry because I'm thinking to myself, who are you to judge whether I am going to be a capable mother and look after my son? So you had to go through a lot of things, people dictating to you how you should and shouldn't live your life. And nowhere did I feel part of that – that it was my contribution, it's what I want. It's more people telling you, this is how you need to do it and this is what you should and shouldn't do. After that obviously it got to a point – even when I was pregnant, with my husband, it got to a point where he was hitting. He started abusing me. And because my mum suffered from domestic violence as well with my dad, it got to a point either that I was either going to completely breakdown, completely go mentally berserk, or either I'm going to pull myself together. And my mum – my mum sometimes reminds me, she goes to me that, 'When you were pregnant you would go out in the rain in literally your t-shirt and jeans.' And I'm, like, eight months pregnant, sitting out in the rain, because I just don't know what to do with life. Life's just gone so wrong all of a sudden. Things have just gone wrong. So basically I pulled myself together and I got my flat and I said to myself that I'm not going to let him come now. It needs to stop. This is not – because I sort of made up my mind from the time that my dad was beating us, that we got out the – we got into care. I said, never ever am I going to let a man hit me. It's not right, it's wrong. And I reminded those sort of thoughts to myself and I said to myself, do you know what, no, it needs to stop and I'm going to get away from it and I'm going to stop it now. So then I got into my flat. Obviously my mum came and stayed with me at my flat. It was just all sorts of things happening at that time. So basically I attended lots of parenting courses, which I think were really, really good because they sort of teach you things that you wouldn't – I know people think, okay, are they telling you to go to a parenting course because I'm a bad mother, but I don't necessarily think that's the

case. I think you just learn new ways of coping with different things and doing things. And obviously social services were involved. They got my son into nursery and they were funding some of his days to go to nursery. It gave me a bit of time out, because they realised – because my sisters were with me still at that time, so they realised it was a lot of pressure on me, and that helped. Then I sort of decided from then, I'll do some voluntary work at the nursery. That opened up a bit of routes, just to go and spend a bit of time, do something different, get out. So from there I did my NVQ level two and three, which the local authority funded. I never knew that was there. So things just opened up from one thing to the other and life sort of took you on. And that's when education came back as a thing, okay, that I'll sort of go on. And luckily I've always hit the borderline to everything in terms of funding, because there are just so many cutbacks. If I was to go and say, let me go and do NVQ level two and three now in childcare, it just wouldn't happen because the funding's not there. But at that time I was quite blessed, I would say, and things happened at the right time. Coping wise, I think I've had so much on my shoulders from a very young age – so I've toughened up from a very, very young age, so there's nothing that I sort of think that I can't cope with at the moment. So hence to why I find that I'm not going to – if I ever get into a relationship at the moment – because I just feel that I'm very bossy and I'm in control of everything at the moment and then somebody has to come and take that away from you, it just feels something's been teared away from you, sort of thing. So yeah, I mean, I've coped. It's been a struggle. I'm not going to say it's been easy. There's been times when I've had fights with my mum, my brother, because they're obviously saying that you're never home. I'm feeling more of that now than ever. Because obviously first year, there's part – you are out with your friends. They want you to go out partying. They want you to go and spend time with them. So you sort of find a mixture between your friends, your family, your colleagues, attending parties and making sure that work's done for coursework and stuff. So it's a real, real struggle, I must say. It's not been easy. But I keep reminding myself that, okay, I'm going to have to bear with my mum and brother for however long but, trust me, they'll be thanking me for it somewhere down the line because I'll be probably the highest earner in the house. I still am at the moment actually because my brother only works part time. So it's something for them to be proud of. And graduation day, I can just imagine my sisters, my son, my mum,

they'll just be so proud of me. So I just keep looking forward to that day. I'm not going to say it's been easy. I feel shattered because I'm at the moment – three days placement and then four days I'm at work, and then in that you've got to find time to do basically your coursework and make time for your family, obviously do what you need to do as well. So it's been hectic, but worthwhile [laughs].

[35:45]

Yeah, definitely. Do you find that you have quite – well, around your other activities, do you find that you have quite an active social life or ...?

I must say, I've got lots of friends. I have got lots and lots of friends. And in a way they always – they will give me compliments and they say, you come across so confident, because they'll be trying to – some of the guys sometimes at uni, they want to get a girl's number but they never know how to approach her, but then I'll just go up to the girl and say hello to her and just get them talking. And in terms of our course generally, I've made so many other friends besides on the social work course, so it's nice because I think, what is there to be sort of scared of. I've been through so much, met so many different people. So I talk to a lot of people and I've got a good networking sort of group of people. That's one thing I'm not scared of, I must say. At the end of the day you are who you are. And I do sometimes get told of that you need to sort of calm down, you're so – I'm always bubbly and so excited. But I just think there's so much to life and there's so much I can offer. So people sometimes – some of the students are Masters and they're coming to ask me in terms of – because obviously employment, they ask how to do your CV and stuff and they go, 'That's really, really good.' I was our class student rep as well. I'm a student ambassador for our university, promoting, what's it called, higher education, so people, like, with disability, people – first time – going on to doing a degree, sort of promoting it to the people that are disadvantaged really. So there's lots and lots happening in terms of my social life but it's now having to sort of really find that balance. But I think things are to get tougher 'cause second year's not going to be easy, I've heard. So I mean, so far so good. I've done well in terms of my grades. I couldn't get any better grades

than what I have right now, I mean, so let's see where it goes. I'm willing to cut back, if anything [laughs].

[37:47]

Very active indeed. Where do you see yourself in, I don't know, say, ten, fifteen years? Or where would you like to be in ten, fifteen years?

I – I'm not sure. I mean, I'm a firm believer in destiny. I think routes will just open up to you. Life will take you into paths that you probably never would have thought of. Like I said, I want to sort of become a guardian for children, but then I might see something totally different crop up or pop up. It's like at the moment, because I've got so much experience with learning disabilities, I never thought I might want to become a social worker for people with learning disabilities. So for all I know, because I'm talking to the managers that – the social workers that come to see our children, our residential support unit, so I might apply for a job there as a learning disability social worker. And you just don't know where life's going to take you. I mean, I'm – my – because I attended a conference two days ago over the weekend and one of our lecturers who is going to be lecturing us in the second year, said that I can see you in social media. So I don't know. I mean, I really don't know. But I must say that I have got a lot to look forward to. Because I've got lots and lots of experience from different jobs that I've done. In terms of education, that will be there as well. So let's see where life sort of takes you, really. I mean, I don't think I'll be lacking any opportunities. If anything, there'll be just so much. There'll be people sort of saying, like, we were like – because lots of people that have said that we would like you here and then I'm thinking how much – where do I go, sort of thinking. So I'll be fighting in terms of myself, where do I want to go. But I mean – so I must say, I'm quite blessed in that context. Like there will be a lot for me to sort of take – grasp hold of, really. So let's see.

How does that make you feel, knowing that potentially you have all of these different opportunities?

I feel proud, I must say, but I also feel I deserve it. Because guess what, life's not been fair to me, to when I should have had a lot of things put in place as a child, but that was all snatched away from me. So I think it's all well deserved at this moment and I feel really, really proud of myself in terms of where I come from to where I have got to now. And there's people on my street at the moment – because we've had our house for twenty-five years, where our house used to be horrible, rats running around, the house was disgusting and it stank, and the house looks absolutely amazing 'cause I'm obviously working and I've done up the house. And it's all going – work's obviously ongoing to the house. But those people now looking at me and I'm like thinking, do you know what, there's you lot not believing as a community that our family could do something with ourselves and look where we are now today. Because you still feel the eyes pop at you, people looking down at you, but guess what, I've come a far way. And you lot should have been there as a community to support my mum and help us, but nowhere did you ever find that as a community. So I just think it's all well deserved and that, whatever life's given, it's made me who I am and I am a stronger person. And I have no regrets to go through what I did because, guess what, then I wouldn't be who I am today. So yeah.

[41:09]

I'm going to go back slightly. You mentioned the house – you said that there was rats running through. If possible, could you just kind of give me like a mental image of the house? So say, for example, you walked through your front door. What – not now that you've done it up but previously, what would you have seen or heard or smelt?

It was horrible. Because obviously we had come from the States in '99, December 25th, I remember we came here. It was raining. We've come from America, after staying five years in America with my dad. My granddad came to pick us up with the family. And the house, I remember all – it was all lodged out, so my granddad's been taking money from the lodgers but done no work in terms of maintaining it, looking after it. In a really, really, really bad state. Basically then me and my brother obviously had to go to school and our friends wouldn't want to come in. It would stink. And me and my brother were literally – even in a smaller room than this.

Probably from here to probably about the end of that picture [demonstrates size] and probably where this camera is right here was a room with me, my mum and my brother in, staying, all three, in the house we'd lodged out. Obviously being a young girl, lodgers looking at you in a very wrong way. It was quite horrible actually. And the neighbours would – just to be nosy, as neighbours are, to come and sort of have a laugh at you, to make a joke out of you, they would come in and they would step outside the door just to have a peep around, what's happening inside the house, but never ever come inside, inside because they'd say we stink. The carpet was, like, twenty-odd years old. There was mice running round the house. It was just in a really, really bad state. And the bathtub wasn't changed for the last twenty-odd years. It was in a real, real bad state. The door was sort of half broken. The bedroom was in a really bad state. Plaster was all hanging off and all sorts of bad things happening. The electrics were in a real bad state. And windows were old, you could see draught coming in from the windows. So it was really tough because I couldn't invite any of my high school friends – couldn't invite any of my friends around. But even to go inside the house, I would sometimes have to sort of sneak in for not – for my friends to know that I live in that house, because obviously you get bullied and you get people picking on you and all sorts of things. We would stink. Hair would be all oily, greasy. Mum wouldn't look after us. I only really learnt how to bath myself and stuff like that at the age of fourteen, I think, because, in terms of hygiene, nothing was taught by my mum. She just expected us to know it, sort of thing, because that's how she – and I sometimes question her, 'Why didn't you teach us all these things?' And she goes, 'I learnt it on my own so you're meant to sort of learn it on your own as well.' My mum being my mum. So yeah, it was a real, real sort of dump, I think, at that time. But obviously I count my blessings because we've got the house and it would be hard to get on the property ladder now. So I'm, what's it called, gone onto the mortgage with my mum, because obviously if I'm going to spend all my money doing it up – because I've been working for so many years, so I've spent over, like, forty grand on just making the house to what it looks like now. So basically I've said to my mum, 'That's not going to be fair. So I want it in my sort of name as well as much as yours so I know it's mine at the end of it. Even though it's going to be the family home, but I want that sort of security.' So I've made sure things are in place. So it's come a long, long way and I'm really proud of it. It looks really, really good

now. And my son's sort of saying he's going to invite his friends around for his birthday and stuff. And I remember those were things that we weren't never able to do, me and my brother. And even with foster carers, they didn't – because I was in Northolt and I used to go to high school in Southall, which is quite a distance, so your friends would never ever want to come down all the way that way. So it would just mean that we were just going out locally for my birthday, not ever going to any home because of that. So yeah.

How does it make you feel, knowing that your son said, you know, he wants people to come round for his party?

I feel happy. Because even he sometimes says, 'The house looks really nice, Mummy.' And I feel happy because I sometimes think I'm living – because when – like, when I was a child, we had no toys. We had no toys whatsoever. So when I was pregnant and when I had my son, I went completely berserk. Because you know when you feel that you've not had it in life, you want to give your child everything and anything possible. I think I spent about five or six thousand pounds on just toys, equipment and things that I thought – that I sort of regret buying now because you think it's such a waste of money, but at that time all I could see is that I didn't have it, I want to give it to him, which I wouldn't recommend people go and do now, but obviously I did at that time. And I'm happy that he feels that he can bring his friends around now. And I feel that somewhere down the line I've contributed and I've done my – my bit as a parent in terms of helping him and for him to feel that he can bring his friends around. So yeah.

[46:22]

That's good. Okay, so – excuse me. What I'm going to do is backtrack slightly now. I'm going to go back to when you were younger.

Okay.

So what are the earliest memories that you have? Not necessarily in care but just generally, what are the earliest memories of childhood?

I'm not sure. Erm, I know that my mum's always been there for us. I remember my mum – well, she's told me but I'm not – obviously I was quite a newborn baby at that time. She left me next to a radiator to go and wash the dishes and I was lying on the floor. I must have been quite young, a couple of days old, and I burnt my leg and the whole radiator just peeled off my skin off my leg. At that time social services got involved and they were going to take me away, but the system wasn't strong at that time obviously – if something like that happened now, it would be complete neglect and your child would get taken away from you, but my mum sort of cried and pleaded and they sort of allowed me to go back with my mum. That's what my mum told me. I remember, like in terms of my mum – looking back at the pictures, she would really treat me like a slave. Because my dad's all extended family, everybody, was all here, so she would cook. And they would only give her two pieces of clothing, one to sort of get dressed into and one to wash, and once that's dried, to put that back on and the other one goes in the wash. And even looking at that picture, that in itself is evidence to say that that's actually what's happened. My mum would wear no makeup, very, very simple sort of lady, locked up in the house to just do cleaning and to have the children and to just look after us and that's it. So – but I remember my granddad was there quite a bit. Education was like his key sort of thing, my granddad. He's always said that – he always used to say to us that time is money. He's still around. I don't talk to him but he's still around. He always used to say that time is money. I never used to understand that but I actually do get the phrase now, that time is money, the more you sort of work in that time, the more money you're going to earn and stuff like that. So I always used to question, what does it mean. But his way of – then again me and my brother, obviously being – he loved us both very, very dearly. But obviously in the Asian culture the boys are always more loved than the girls and I think that still seems to be a phase. But it seems to be breaking slowly but gradually, but in our family the boy was always loved more than the girl. So yeah. So my granddad's way of teaching us was, I must say, most wrong, 'cause he would hit us, slap us, beat us, just to make sure that we were learning and we were doing things correctly. When I was a bit older my – he must have hit me really hard, my mum got

a knife and stabbed him in his hand [laughs]. She stabbed him in his hand because she goes, how dare you hit my daughter. Yeah, so things have got really bad between them two at times as well.

How old were you at that stage when your mum –

I was quite young, I think, five or six. So yeah, so she did things like that. And she – she told my granddad once that – I think I heard this a lot, that she said to him that she's going to stab us both in our sleep. Yeah, so my granddad slept by the both of us just to make sure she wouldn't do anything to us. I know that she used to say things, a lot of things, but she probably doesn't end up doing them. But depending on the state of – frame of mind that she was in, she could probably do it. I'm not even sure but I don't think she would. I wouldn't want to think that she would do that because we're her children. So – but I remember me, my brother, we stole a lot of stationery from school, in primary school, and we hid it in the skips. 'Cause school was left open [ph] we hid it in the skips. There was a temple across the road and we hid things in the skip. 'Cause we weren't given things, my mum would never buy us things. And I remember my mum leaving me and my brother home alone loads of times because she had to go out and work and stuff. I remember her forming relationships and I felt really, really angry, 'cause she never gave us the time but then she obviously had relationships formed with other men that she was with at that time. I mean, I'm not sure. I remember me and my brother going back and forth a lot to India. We did a lot of travelling. Mum would take us back to India quite a lot to see her family, my dad's family, a lot of travelling. We would see our dad regularly as well, just to see him every – once a year and stuff, travelled back and forth to America quite a bit. Then it came to when we were, like, seven, I think, when – because my dad had this woman that left with him from here to go to the States. When I was three and my brother was newborn-ish, I think, one I think, he left to go to America to settle down there because his passport wouldn't come here. Something happened in terms of his immigration state and stuff here so then he decided he'll go to America rather than stay here. So he left us with the house and went back – went to America at that time and then the woman went with him. My mum obviously knew the case. And my granddad – then when we were seven my granddad said that the woman's left him and

that he's in a good sort of position so why don't you go and move over and stay with him now. So my mum took all her gold, all her savings, all her money, from here to there, and when we get there guess what happens? The woman knocks on the door in the afternoon. We were thinking she'd left him and he's a changed man. And he'd lied to us that he had a big house and this, that, the other, but he was in an apartment. So that was a shock in itself. But I think to my mum it didn't come as a shock, because I think somewhere down the line she knew she was stitched up. So nothing – because she's had so much thrown at her, nothing sort of came as a shock to her. But for me it was a big, big shock. I remember her coming to the apartment, thinking, what the heck is she doing here, sort of thing, my dad said that he's left her, and all sorts of things at that time. And then we got into a lot – because – being Asian and the society there was quite Mexican and white orientated, it was a lot of racism at that time, I felt, so we used to get windows and all that broken into. And because it was only my dad at that time, things weren't as blunt. But obviously, children being children, we were out and about, playing and going swimming and doing things, and things – so neighbours started noticing us now. So my dad found that we were getting into a lot of trouble so then he eventually – we moved, I think, thirty times into different apartments all over sort of California, he was in California, from, like, San Francisco to Concord to San Diego, to Sacramento. I can't remember half of the places that we moved to. I just remember every couple of months we were on the back of a truck thing, loading furniture, moving. So in terms of school, education, totally disrupted. Didn't have no sort of education after we left from here. It was just totally messed up, totally and utterly messed up. But then eventually he bought a house. He realised –

How old – sorry, how old were you roughly when he bought the house?

I think it was about a year and a bit, so I must have been about eight, nine. So he went and bought a house and then after buying a house – de, de, de, de, de. We got the house and stuff. He – it was nice though. Our dad got us involved in the house buying process. I thought that was nice. I'm not going to – I'll give him that credit. It was nice for us to go and see which was nice and which one wasn't. Excuse me, is it alright if I have a sip of water?

[54:02]

So me and my brother bought the house with our dad. It was nice. So after that we got into education. My school was a bit far so I used to get onto a school bus. My brother never liked education, he still doesn't, so he – my dad used to obviously work as a courier. So what my brother would do is hide on top of the roof, because you know the roofs aren't that high and it's a – what do you call it? With no stairs basically – a bungalow, that's it [laughs], it's a bungalow house. So basically he – my brother would get up on top of the – because there was a massive tree there he'd climb back down from. So he used to sit on top of the roof and stuff whilst my dad's gone and then just go back and my mum knew that he never went to school. But I've always liked education so I used to go to school. I used to make sure I went to school. Yeah, so he bought the house. And then I remember – but this is in one of the flats. I'm going to rewind back a little bit. When we were at the flat I lied to my dad – because my dad's always looked up to me. My dad's not educated either. So again, like in terms of paperwork, in terms of reading, in terms of doing things, it was down to me again from a very, very young age. So I'm looking at [laughs] like eight, nine again, just to read his papers, read his stuff. And obviously, not knowing much yourself, I've always tried to sort of make sure that I tried to impress him. I lied to him that I didn't have no homework one time and he went and found my red homework card, sort of knowing that it was homework, but it was ticked off, I had done it, but he just thought I'd lied to him. So he got one of the Indian swords. They're like – it's called a Kirpan [ph], which is a really big sword that the Indian – it's like a symbolism of Sikhism. He beat me with that. But it had the thing on top of it and luckily it didn't cut through to me, but he battered the heck out of me and he pushed my mum and he literally beat me because I lied to him. And it was sort of things like that. But I still remember that because my mum, when she was bathing me, she was saying, 'Look at the bruises.' But she self – she just felt so helpless, so she would just sit there crying, not doing anything for us. And then I remember also – there's always been this thing against black people. I don't know why, like, Asians don't like black people, for whatever reason it is. My dad's very, very traditional, I shall say, very cultural, and so one day he came to school with me to drop me off and

stuff and one of the guys – there was a black boy that was in my class and he spoke to me just out of context, just asked where I was and why I didn't come to school and why am I late. And my dad, not understanding English, thought that he was sort of flirting with me or just talking to me as in there's something happening between us two. And when I went back home, he beat me silly, saying, how dare you talk to a guy, this, that, the other. And then one – there's another incident where me and the next door neighbours, the guys – it was a guy and a girl, boy and a girl again, next door neighbours, me and my brother were playing. And my dad – I didn't – because I used to be conscious of my dad's timing, when he used to come back from work, 'cause I never used to play outside 'cause I knew he would then get angry and go berserk. So it wasn't his time but he came back early now. He must have saw us and he was spying on me playing outside on our courtyard in front of the garage with the next door neighbours. At that time I must have been playing with a boy. But there was nothing wrong, it was just playing, childhood play. He was spying for a couple – I think half an hour, he said, and then he turned around and I saw his white truck coming and then I ran into the garage, into the house, not making anything – hoping that he didn't see it. But he pulled me by my hair and he had toecaps on and he beat me. And I think he hit me really hard in my ribs at that time. And my mum went flying because she tried to get him off of me. I think I was just in so much pain at that particular point and I said to myself – next morning I went to school and I spoke to my friend Jessica. I still remember her, because me and her were tight, as in really, really good friends. And I said to her, 'Look, that's what my dad's been doing,' and explained, 'This is what's been happening.' So she told me to go and tell our teacher, Miss Winter. I spoke to my teacher, crying and being emotional, not understanding what's going to happen, and I said, 'I don't want to go back home. It's just – it's too much now. It's gone beyond the point where I can sort of handle it and it's just not on.' So I remember me and my brother got – my brother got brought to my school, my elementary school, and we were kept there and police went and arrested my dad, and my mum was there. They handcuffed him, took him down to the police station and that was the – and my mum was given the option to come with me and my brother in some sort of home or something, but then the girl – my – when we were packing our things just to leave, the social worker was there, I think – quite young, I can't remember the details, but I remember us packing our things, just getting our

belongings together, and the girlfriend rang, the lady that I spoke about early. She convinced my mum not to come with us. So social services said that me and my brother have to be taken, we can't stay there, it's not safe for us, and my mum begging and pleading but then they had to leave her because she's an adult and they can't force her to come with us. So basically me and my brother got taken. We got put into like a big – nice big home. It was quite nice. I remember my brother's birthday being celebrated in a way I had never, ever seen. He had like a whole closet full of toys and I was just so excited. But by the time I had to move – by the time it was my birthday we sort of had to move and then we went into a carer – foster carer. Erm, she was nice. I mean, very lovely lady. But then I think – because I was anorexic at that time, really, really not eating well. Things were just wrong at that time. So they sort of – it was against our culture to eat meat. They then started forcing us to have meat and it wasn't nice. And I still remember that as being a very horrible experience. We used to chuck the hotdogs underneath the – when we used to – we used to do a lot of camping, so then we used to chuck it underneath the thing, but then you'd get caught out. And we were sort of forced to eat when we didn't want to eat. But I think they must have been scared that we're going to – that we'll be tube fed and all sorts of other things maybe, that's their way of looking at it. There were other children in that home as well. And then –

Was this all – sorry, was this all still in America?

Yeah still in America. And then it came to a point where the States said that obviously – where are we going to go with these children, what's going to happen? But they knew were British born so they – they got in touch with my granddad here – obviously they look at extended family. They got in touch with my granddad and my granddad came down. My grandmother passed away. She was going to come at that time. She passed away, I think due to just shock of what's actually happened in the family. Because everybody else was very closely knitted and it was just us that things happened to have gone wrong for. So me and my – my granddad then jumped in, bought tickets for us to come back. I don't know why but he did. But I remember – but looking at the fact that my mum had very little support in terms of getting to the contact centre – because the contact was at the contact centre again and it was all

timed and supervised and all of that. But she had some of my dad's family friends that did help and support her to bring her to come and see us, but there's times that she was late and then we'd just get taken back because you only get a certain amount of time that you can be late within and if you're late then that's it, you have lost that opportunity. I felt really bad because we wanted to go back with our mum. We wouldn't understand why we couldn't go back with our mum. And I remember me and my brother, we had long, long hair, and even my brother had long, long hair. And guess what we did? Because we were in care and we sort of had that freedom and liberty, I think. So we just cut it. And my mum, oh my god, when she saw us at the contact centre she burst out crying. She was in absolute tears. She'd go, 'What the heck have you done? All my years of oiling and greasing your hair just to make sure that it looks well and that it was long.' She was in real tears. But then we had to sort of tell her that, listen, it was hard for us to cope with. Because obviously you're not going to get nobody bath you there. Because my mum's always bathed us up until we were, like, ten, and my brother was in bottles up into the age of eight. Nappies, no, but bottles, yeah, until the age of eight. So it was just quite crazy. And so I said to my mum, 'Nobody washes our hair for us. How are you – how are you expecting us to cope with such heavy and thick hair? It's hard to comb. You need to go to school in the mornings. What are you meant to do with it?' So we just cut it. I had a bob, a short bob, and my brother just shaved all his off and left it very tiny, so he could gel it and stuff. So – and then my granddad obviously – going back to the point. My granddad paid for our tickets and we came back here, went undetected by social services for a couple of years until a point where my mum fell sort of ill and we had to start taking care of her again.

[1:02:55]

Sorry, was your mum still in America?

No, no, she came back with us – in '99 now. We're back in – from '99, then we're back over here. My granddad's paid for the tickets –

And he paid for your mum's ticket?

Yeah.

Right, okay.

So – because what the government was – what the – I don't know to call it a government or to call it social services. What they were proposing is that if nobody puts themselves forward to look after us, they'll basically then – we'll be sort of States children and we'll be in care for the rest of our lives now, basically. Where we were going to go, we won't know. So my granddad said that he doesn't want that, that he opted for us to come back here. So we came back here now. Mum fell ill. Things were just really wrong here. Me and my mum, my brother, all in a smaller room than this. You can imagine. And then I had to – I started high school from Year 7, so I'd missed out a lot of education before that. My brother went into primary school. Things went undetected. And then I was bunking just to make sure Mum was doing okay, things are just in place and stuff. So social services did now got involved because they'd obviously seen that – because school was saying that attendance is not there. Lack of hygiene., we were coming in a real bad state, ripped clothes at times.

Was this when you were in that house that you mentioned earlier?

Our house now, yeah.

Female: Sorry guys, we've gone over an hour now. Shall we have – is this a good point to break or do you want to –

Yeah, yeah, that's fine.

Are you happy to break?

Shall we round it off and then –

If you'd like to, yeah.

Yeah, I'll round it off and then I'll – then we'll break.

So basically what happened is – then – de, de, de, where was I? In terms of the house, where we are now, this is our family house. We were there. It went undetected and social services obviously got involved, I think after two years or two years, two and a bit years. But our case history was there. In terms of – I think it should have been that – America informed social services when we did come over but obviously that didn't happen, I'm not sure why not, so no support was put in place for Mum. And the family's always been rubbish. My dad's – because my mum's not got her family here. It's always been my dad's side of the family that's always been here. Because my dad's brother, sister, they're all here, very closely – close by, literally fifteen minutes' walk, so not far at all, within Southall again. So basically – erm, where was I? So basically – so it went undetected, social services got involved then when it did happen, because school obviously were concerned in terms of attendance and stuff and just things not going right and in terms of how I was doing in my overall academic work. And then social services saw the house and I think they took an emergency care order at twelve o'clock at night. Something must have happened, I think. Again my mum went really berserk and I think she kept saying that she's going to kill us both, me and my brother. So we got taken away now, early hours of the morning. And again, very badly informed in terms of our mum. And I think it's a real – real huge thing where English is not your first language, that people are not getting the right help and support put in place. So I made sure that – in terms of my sisters, that I was there for my mum. Even though that shouldn't have been my role and social services should have ensured that my mum was getting the right guidance and help, I then made sure that I was advocating and giving her all that she knew, that she was entitled to, sort of thing. So yeah, so then we ended up in care here and then things go on from there. And I'll sort of talk about it afterwards obviously. But yeah.

Yeah, thank you.

You're welcome.

Are you happy to break now?

Yes.

Yeah, okay. Wonderful. Thank you.

[1:06:36]

Okay. So before the break obviously you took us through almost like a timeline of your childhood. What I wanted to do is go back again to some of your earliest memories. You said that obviously where you were – and you were with your brother. You mentioned about how your mum took a knife to your granddad – yeah, was it – yeah, it was your granddad's hand.

Yeah.

And you mentioned that she threatened to kill you both, to stab you and your brother with a knife. At that point, what impact did that have on you?

I can't even remember because – I do remember that my mum was in and out of hospital a lot at that time, because I don't think the community care was as sort of up and happening at that point in time. So a lot of the time my mum was in Ealing Hospital, St Bernard's, at the back sort of – in Ealing, so my granddad would a lot of the time take us to see her there. So I knew something was wrong, like she wasn't up there 110 percent. So at that time I sort of just thought she was sort of joking. But obviously my granddad being there throughout the night with us sort of made me think, she couldn't have really wanted to do that. And I did feel scared, not of her as such but just of – what if something did go wrong, what would happen then, sort of thing. But I mean, I've always loved my mum and I've always treated her like a little baby. She's – so I will mother her now. So – and I've always – never found her and my relationship to be as a mother and daughter relationship. It's always been like a sister – sister or even a friend relationship. Even today, even now, I still feel that

we're more sisters or we're more friends than a mother and daughter as such. So yeah.

Have you ever wanted it to be more of a mother and daughter relationship?

Definite, absolutely. And that's why I sort of sometimes – a lot of my older friends, some of them – I tend to mix with a lot of older people. A lot of my circle of friends are not my age. I find it very hard to mix with people of my age 'cause I just – I find that we have nothing in common. And so a lot of the older people, I find that they're like all forty plus and I find that we've got a lot more in common. And a lot of them I look up to as motherly figures indirectly now, even today. So even when they do guide me and they do tell me off, I take it as a good thing because I've never had that from my mum. Sometimes I need a bit of a smack and sort of to be told that – listen, you're wrong here, you need to be told. So yeah, and so I – but in terms of my mum, I've always wished that – why couldn't she be part of my school plays, role plays, and when we were doing well at school, why couldn't she be there as other parents would. I felt really bad 'cause it just felt that there was nobody there to be proud of what I was doing at that time. So I think somewhere down the line that's just taught me that, okay, nobody is proud of you, you be proud of what you've achieved. And so that's why, even if people now aren't proud of where I've got to, I'm proud of myself because, guess what, I've come sort of a long way and I have to appreciate that I've done whatever I've done up until now. So even now I don't think my mum sort of really understands what I'm doing and how much I'm doing, but I think that's just going to be my mum and that's just the way life's going to be. There's certain things you just can't change, even if you wanted to.

[1:10:13]

Have you always recognised your own achievements or your own kind of progress?

Have you always recognised it?

No. There were times when I felt I was useless. There were times when I felt I'm not going to do anything with my life, that – and I even felt like life's just not worth

living. I just want to, like, die and I just want to kill – I think there were times when I took an overdose of, like, Paracetamol and stuff, just thinking that it would work. But then when I was told – oh, what you did, you could have had a liver failure, it makes you think, okay, I didn't really want to do that. That's not probably the wisest idea of doing things. But there were times when I was so angry, I just didn't know what to do with myself and who to talk to, where to go. And it just felt like everybody's making decisions for you but not getting you involved in those decisions – in that decision making progress. So everything's being dictated to you, in a way, and you're not getting the chance to say what is it that you want in life. So life – life at that time was really hard, I must say, because everything just seemed to be a struggle. Everybody seems to have everything and you yourself have nothing. You're going on basic – nothing. So even now, if I work at times, I do go out and buy myself something really expensive and spoil myself, 'cause I think, what the heck [laughs], when I've been younger I've not had that. So in terms of looking after myself, I – and people do say that, why do you always go over the board with everything, but I go, guess what, I've not had it [laughs]. I know that I shouldn't do that but it's just part of me and I just realise that, whatever I'm doing, actually I need to be proud of what I'm doing now and how much I've got through and where – to where I've got now. It must be worth something than nothing. So yeah.

[1:12:00]

[Clears throat] Sorry. How old were you when you decided to take an overdose?

My placement was going really bad at that time. I think I was fourteen at that time. My foster placement was really, really, really bad at that time. It was with an Asian family. Because me and my brother, we always – me and my brother were always told that me and my brother were amongst very few Asian children at that time that were taken into care. Obviously numbers have changed now but at that time me and my brother were known amongst sort of a few boroughs as being the few Asian children that have been taken into care. So there was a lot of stigma around that. And then my mum got married to somebody down class – caste wise. There's a whole caste system within our culture as well. So – and my mum belonged to a higher sort

of class – upper – up class, and she got married to somebody down class, so basically that in itself looked very, very wrong in terms of my mum's end. So the community sort of disrespecting her and saying, how can you do that and leave your own class and go and marry to somebody sort of lower class. And the foster carers obviously knew about it because we – I would tell and share my experiences of what's happening at home, because we would go and see my mum and stuff, and they would then criticise my mum. I remember when we were having at the table, saying that, how can your mum do this to you, you shouldn't be in care, your mum should have sort of tried her best to look after you, and made us feel really, really bad. And even in terms of food, the Asian carer would basically buy our food – not to say there's anything wrong with Lidl's food, but our food would be kept in the conservatory and it would be always bought from Lidl. Their children would have food from Asda or Tesco's. And there was almost that sense of differentiation, that we're not part of the family and we're meant to be part of the family but yet we're not part of the family. Even from social services end, when that – the initial placement that we were put into, the carer had us for about three months, then she wanted to go away to India and we could have gone with her, but because of funding social services never paid for us to go with her. So then basically we got put into another placement while she was meant to have come back and then we liked the carer. And I think she wanted to keep us, but then realising that she's such a horrible, horrible lady in terms of what she did afterwards. She got us to make accusations against our previous carer and wrote a whole letter, typed it up, saying how badly we were treated, sort of made things up for us and then got us to sign it and then gave it to the social worker so that then we stayed with her and things just went really, really downhill after that. But then I also sometimes think that, when you're in care, how does it make sense that you're meant to be part of the family but yet you're not going to fund for us to go on holiday. So do you really feel part of the family? Because if I was allowed to go on holiday, I will take my son without any doubt and think – I wouldn't think twice, if I'm going, my son's going with me and my mum's coming with me as well. We wouldn't think, oh yeah, they haven't got the money so they're going to stay behind. So yet on the one hand they're promoting to be part of a family, on the second hand then yet they're taking that right away from you of being part of that family. So it doesn't make no sense whatsoever to me. So that was another thing, when my sisters went into care I

made sure that, if the family was to go on holiday, that the girls go with them regardless – if social services need to pay that money, they will pay it, otherwise the carer's not to go on holiday and stay behind with the girls, because how are they going to feel. On one hand they're calling them Mum and Dad and yet then when they go on holiday they have to go to another home whilst they're going away. It doesn't make sense. So basically the foster carer would buy our food from Lidl and keep it in the back conservatory. And one time I must have ate a Frosties bar, like cereal bar, and the husband grabbed me by my throat and pushed me against the wall and said, 'How dare you touch that? It wasn't yours for you to eat,' and this, that and the other. It was just – it was really, really silly. My brother went and complained about it. They had a big multiagency meeting. I decided to stay in – I felt bad – because I think somewhere down the line she emotionally blackmailed me, so I felt bad. My brother left and he went back home. From then he sort of went back home. Because he was absconding from school anyways, he always said that he wants to go back home. And my mum agreed for him to come back home. She wanted him to come back anyways. She tried to sort herself out so that he could come back home. But I just felt my mum wouldn't be able to provide the right boundaries, the guidance, the support that I needed, so I said it's not going to be worth me going back home. I can go see her but I can't stay with her, because I still need a lot of pushing, advising, guiding, which my mum's not able to do for me so there's no point in going back home. So I stayed with that carer but then it just got really, really out of control. She – her behaviour was just getting out of control in terms of the way she was treating us, the way she was talking about my mum. Okay, fair enough, Mum's not – my mum wasn't the greatest person at that time, but my mum's my mum, right, and there needs to be that level of professionalism, I think, that, okay, my mum's treated me bad but you have no right to say anything bad about my mum. That's happened, it's past, you can't change it, but you're meant to be here for me, not then remind me of what my mum's done wrong towards me. So I think it just came to a point when I said, 'I've had enough' and I told my social worker that I want a new placement. And then I moved to another home. And then ever since then – I was a bit scared because my dad's always brought us up with the culture of not liking black people. There's always been – I don't know whether I can say it's racism or maybe it's just a lack of understanding towards the black culture. So ever since then, I moved to the Jamaican

lady – my foster carer, she’s Jamaican and had three daughters. I was a bit scared and thinking, oh my god, where am I going to go with this, because I’d never ever integrated with black people as such. But a life – life experience, I must say. And ever since then I find myself more towards – sort of – even in terms of my friends, more – all of them pretty much are black. I don’t have many Asian friends. And I feel like I’ve been disowned by the Asian culture in a way, indirectly, as well because they’ve never been there supporting me but yet the people that I’ve always been told not to like, they’ve been there for me indirectly and they’ve sort of supported me to be who I am today. So then I was there for – until I was eighteen and then I went into higher education and stuff. But then obviously I fell pregnant and then things went on from there. So yeah.

[1:18:33]

Yeah. How did you find that then? Because obviously having your father, you know, kind of against you talking to black people – and you mentioned before about the boy at your school. How did you find it when you were first kind of interacting with black people? I mean, was it – you know, what kind of emotions were you feeling?

I think there was a lot of stereotypes and prejudices that I was brought up with, that black people are bugs, that they’re basically good for nothing and that they’re horrible people and all of this other nonsense. My mum still finds it very difficult and finds it extremely hard when she meets my black friends, because I still introduce them – because my work colleague, he’s a best friend of mine as well, so he’s met my mum a few times. But I gave him a cuddle and she finds that very, very difficult now to accept up until today. And then I got a real telling off a couple of weeks ago while she was sitting in the car. She goes, ‘How dare you hug him in front of people? People are looking at you,’ this, that and the other. ‘Oh my god, Mum, stop. Just stop for one minute.’ In terms of my own emotions, I was scared of them. I felt very intimidated, not understanding anything – because I had always been sort of told that blacks, they’re the sort of people that are up to no good, that would be horrible and this, that, the other. So I had a totally different image. But then once I sort of started staying with the family, I said, ‘They’re human beings, are they not?’ I totally got a

different understanding. They're human beings. And when my dad said they're unclean, they're dirty, they're this, that and the other, I'm thinking, no, that's so not the case. Okay, you're going to get different people in different cultures and colours regardless being like that, but you can't just classify black people all in that sort of context. So yeah, I did feel really, really scared and intimidated and I found it very hard to open up, I think, initially. But then I found myself, once I left care, embracing their culture. And I don't know. And a lot of people always say to me now that even some of the – let's say, even like when I've had interviews or meetings I've been – attended in, there's a group of black, Asian and white people, I always see myself going towards and mixing with the black people for some reason, because I understand their culture and I feel that I just have a lot more understanding of them than I would find in my own, I think. So I find myself in a right dilemma in terms of my own culture, which way do I belong, this way or that way. Because I spent four years with this carer, it's quite a lot time, so you learn sort of their culture, you adapt to their lifestyle and stuff. So yeah.

[1:21:15]

Yeah. You mentioned earlier that one of the carers that you had, she was giving you separate food to what she was giving her own children and she made you feel like you weren't part of the family.

Mm.

That feeling, is that something that you've experienced throughout your time in care or was it kind of limited to that one foster placement?

I think regardless of where you are, you get that feeling. Because you know that they're getting money for you. There's another child that I know that I'm in touch with, he never knew that the carer was getting money for him and he was – he saying that he's going – when he gets older he's going to do something well in his life and do something big and then he's going to give her money and support her. He never ever knew and then I sort of told him, look. So I was quite wise – like streetwise in that

context. So I sort of told him that, 'No, she's getting money for you.' It's hard because I've never understood whether people are genuinely doing it because they want to do it or are they doing it because they're in financial crisis or situation. It's – but my last carer, I don't think she did it because of the money. Nowhere down the line did I ever feel she was doing what she did because she wanted the money, because it just – it didn't come across. But with the other ones, I did feel that it was more because they just – they needed the money and they never treated them as part of the family and it was just – but in my overall experience, like in America and that, it was a good experience, I must say, in terms of – they looked after you, they bought you things that they would – they don't have to because you – at that time I didn't even know they were getting money for us. So they went out their way. And they used to take us camping and they used to take us on holidays. So that was a good experience in America, besides the fact that we were forcing – forced to eat stuff that we didn't want to eat. But on the whole the experience in America was a good experience, I must say. It's not as sort of rigid as here. The carers do – here you've got to take permission for everything and anything. There, the carers were in control, like they could just take you on holiday and go and do what they wanted to do. And I think here, everything seems to be about funding, money, they haven't got the money, so children are – and they need to think emotionally how traumatising is it for children, just keeping moving from one family to the other. Erm, gosh. But my last carer, I mean, I would say hats off to her. She didn't do it because of the money. She genuinely had the passion and she loved children. And I never ever – never ever once did I hear her say anything bad against my family. She was there for me, for me alone, and when I needed her, she spoke to me about me. And when I did try and go away on my mum's topic and spoke to her about things, genuinely it does come out, she just listened, but she didn't say nothing. Maybe – and I think that's the safer side to play than to get involved and then start criticising. Because, guess what, I still remember now my mum being criticised obviously from the Asian carer. And the Asian carer used to – I mean, it was just a real bad experience in that one particular family, I think. And she's a qualified social worker, I've heard, now. Quite scary to think that, listen, this is a woman that did this and now she's a qualified social worker. So it does kind of really make you think about the people we have in the workforce. So I don't know.

[1:24:38]

You mentioned obviously about your time in care in America. Obviously what with it being two completely different environments and two completely different countries, what would you say would be the main differences between foster care in America and foster care in England?

Oh wow. I think in America the social workers, the foster carers, seem to be more compassionate, seem to be more there for you. And it wasn't as bureaucratic as here in terms of the environment, just in terms of providing stuff for children and stuff. There seems to be a lot more of a leeway there than there is here. Here everything just seems very rigid and tight and everything just seems to be sort of paper, tick box sort of – you've got to get permission for everything. And sometimes you've got to – rather than looking at these forms that have been put in place, you've got to sometimes think out of the box and think, we've known this family for this long so let's trust this family. Okay, maybe it might be a bit risky, but over time I'm sure you do build up a rapport in terms of relationships and you get to understand [inaud], you get to understand people for who they are. Even in terms of – like initially we were in a residential – big residential home. There's a lot more children there, there's a lot more freedom in terms of activities and things that will happen. Here there's not much happening. Because my brother was in residential here, 365 Florence Road in Ealing, I'm not sure if that rings any bells, but yeah, they're like two homes, one's shut, one's still open. It's just quite closed and not as open. And there seems to be a lot more professionals coming in and out, doing this, doing that, but really a waste of space in a way because they're not really there for you in a way. And sometimes you just – sometimes it just takes that one person to be in your life to make that difference and help you to become a successful person. You'll have so many different people coming in and out your life and then you're thinking, what the heck. You're confused. And in America I didn't see the social worker as much. A lot of responsibility and trust was given to the carer. Maybe sometimes that's what needs to be put in place than social workers coming in. Like here you've got social workers coming in and out of your lives and just – this review, that meeting, this meeting, that

meeting. I don't even remember attending any meetings as such. The carer was there. She supported – she met all our overall needs. So yeah, in terms of money, funding, everything was there. Just more looked after, I think, in that context.

[1:27:20]

Yeah, okay. Again, going back to your time in America, you mentioned earlier that when you arrived there your father's girlfriend was still there.

Mm.

While you were living in the apartment and then in the house, where was the girlfriend?

She was working, I believe, five days a week, so she'll come and spend the time over the weekend with my dad. But in terms of my mum's and dad's relationship, as you would probably think that a husband and wife are meant to be in one room, that then again in my dad's – when we got the big house, me and my mum and brother were all put in one room anyway again. Mum was again treated like a slave, cook, clean, look after the children. And she was never even given money to go and buy anything. So I remember my mum – as females, you have your monthly cycle, period, so she needed to buy sanitary towels. Now he would never buy them for her, so she would have to exchange things to go and get her basic necessity things that she needed. It was horrible. He wouldn't even give her a dollar to spend. No spending money whatsoever, not – nothing. And when she would go and return things he would beat her, but then she would try and explain and he just wouldn't want to listen. So basically that's the kind of treatment my mum got. So even up until today, my mum doesn't understand the meaning of money. As long as I provide her basic – so again, she's very, very vulnerable to abuse and stuff. So as long as I meet her overall needs and take her and stuff, she's quite happy within that. But it makes you really think, doesn't it, like hold on a minute, you're entitled to – this is your money. And even the money that she took from here, she worked all that time, he took it and never gave it back to her. So I don't know. It's quite sad, I think.

[1:29:07]

When you were younger did you kind of understand the situation that your mum was in – your mother, sorry. Did you understand, you know, kind of what was happening to her or what she was going through?

No. We didn't have no understanding. All I know is that – is that last time when he beat me, when he kicked me in my ribs with the toecaps, I – I said to myself that I've had enough. It needs to stop somewhere. And I think my mum tells me even till today, she tells me, 'If it wasn't for you, my life was a living hell. If it wasn't for you, we would have still – gone nowhere, I would have been today – whether I would have even been alive today or whether I would have died.' He could have – he was – my dad's a monster. He could have even killed her and nobody would have even known about it, because to the world he made it look like he was this perfect husband and he's a good man but – I mean, we knew what we were facing, the atrocities that we were facing within the house and how he was treating us like animals basically. Nobody would have even known about it. He – he would beat her, hit her. And then my mum one time was bleeding immensely from her finger but he still went and made her cook, go and get on with it, like nothing's happened. It's like, hold on a minute, stop there. You need to think. But I don't know. I think 'cause my dad was beaten himself from my granddad, it sort of ran in the family, I think I think he thought it was okay for him to do that.

So your granddad that you mentioned, who also bought your tickets to come back, is he your father's father?

Yeah.

Right.

So I think it's a culture – very cultural thing, that women are sort of to be locked up, stay at home, have kids, cook, clean, iron, do whatever and just not go outside the

house and keep their mouth shut and basically not do anything with their lives. Whereas the men are to be the sort of breadwinners and to go out and earn and take the money role. I'm not sure, I don't know. And even when myself, when I'm growing up, I remember my dad buying me very – when I was, like, eight, fourteen, fifteen year old t-shirts, loose, baggy clothes. Can't wear nail varnish, can't have long nails, can't have hair open, can't wear no makeup. I think – so all of that I sort of went and rebelled against. And okay, I'm – I can say I do wear a lot of makeup but I think somewhere down the line – 'cause that's probably because you've never had that chance to experiment with things when you were young and just to get on with things. And then when you're deprived of things, you – I've gone completely bonkers on everything and think that, you know, what the heck [laughs]. You've not had it when you were young so I've gone completely nuts now. But I think – so I still – at the end of the line [ph], I'm fighting with myself to balance things out because obviously they – too much of anything isn't good. But still it has an impact, I think, in my life somewhere down the line in terms of what he's done to us, in terms of our relationship, in terms of me – me sort of – hence to why I met the wrong man in my life, 'cause I've never had a good father figure. So this man's come in my life and I'm thinking he's the right person and things have gone completely wrong again as well for myself. But luckily I was wise enough to get myself out the situation, but my mum probably would have still been in the same mess if it wasn't for myself, I think. And she still says that. But she still blames me because you've got, your brother came back home when you were in care, you decided you didn't want to come back home. She still holds that against me. But then I still have to keep reminding her, hold on a minute, I was there – 'cause you – you wouldn't have done anything for me. Where would I have got in life if I would have come back home anyways? What money would you have given me? Where would you – how would you have supported me in terms of – 'cause we never used to get no pocket money. We used to get nothing. Basically free school meals were sort of provided and uniform was at that time. I think you used to get uniform grants, my mum was on benefits. But I said, what have I done – you can't go out with your friends, you can't do nothing, you've got no pocket money, people are laughing at you, what do you do? So – and had no room in the house anyways. So – and lodgers running around and you're growing girls, what the heck, sort of thing. So she still blames me for it but then I

have to sort of still go back and remind her, no, the decision I took, I took a good decision, I think, that I decided to stay in care, because it wouldn't have been worth me coming back home. So she still does blame me for it but then, hey, it is what it is. I have no regrets, so ...

[1:33:46]

You said before that your mother's family, I believe – are they still in India?

My mum's got a brother in Norway and the rest of the family's all in India. Sister's gone to Canada.

Can you remember your mother ever having any contact with her family or with her friends?

When we were younger my mum used to go see the family with me.

Sorry, yes, you did say earlier.

But I think ever since – when she got married to this guy, they always used to say to her that, look, if you ever do want to get married, we'll find you a man, we'll get you settled down and stuff, 'cause they knew all the situation. 'Cause my dad was very abusive towards her family, ringing them, swearing at them, threatening them, saying 'I'm going to have you guys killed,' and all sorts of other nonsense. So my mum's come from a very influential family. Her dad's done really well, got lots of properties everywhere. So she's from a well family, my mum. So basically when they found out that she's done what she's done, got married to somebody down class – again, the whole class system's a very big thing, basically they've disowned her. And in terms of friends, I think – I pick and choose who she should and shouldn't hang around with, I think. I sort of dictate that to her now, even till now, 'cause I'm very overprotective. Because I've had a lot of people trying to ask her in terms of what benefits she's on, how much money she's getting, and I'm just thinking, it all looks very dodgy. So because of the fact that I know that there's a lot of financial abuse and

people can get hold of your sort code, account details and do all sorts of dodgy things, I sort of tried to wizen her up a bit, just to say that, don't tell people what kind of things you're getting and what you're doing. Just tell them that you're doing something with your life but you don't need to know. Because a lot of friends, the friends, they get to know her and understand that it's me that's sort of – I'm helping her. So they try to see if they can sort of worm their way in and then try to get her to sort of side up with them and then their – 'cause my mum's got to a point where her passport was taken and the woman sold the passport. And when I found out, I had to go and reapply for another passport, but the woman got in trouble 'cause she tried bringing somebody from America, I think – or was it Canada? No, from India, sorry, into the country on her passport. And I said – and she got jailed for two years. So I said to my mum, 'You can't do things like that.' And she's just so vulnerable. She's so naïve and she falls for people's traps very, very quickly. She just trusts people so quickly. So I said to her, 'Family's always going to be family so don't trust people as quickly.' And I tell her not to bring people back to the home. So me more mothering her now. And she does listen. But I am quite overprotective if she was to go make friends, just to make sure that they're the right people that she's hanging around with. I don't think she has got many friends. She talks to people but no – not anybody that she goes out with to, say, like shopping. So she relies on me to take her shopping and just to go and do a bit of – girly things, go out for coffee. So I'm going to take her on holiday to Spain. So she relies on me on those sort of daily sort of stuff. So we're more friends, I think, and a sister – sister relationship rather than a mother/daughter relationship. Quite different [laughs].

[1:37:00]

Mm, yeah. Obviously you've brought up the theme of trust. Earlier on you also mentioned trust. You said when you were pregnant and your husband was there and you mentioned about – now you're going to be more selective in partners. What impact do you think your childhood and your experiences have had on you in terms of your thoughts towards trust?

A lot, I think, because I think, when I initially informed my teacher in America in terms of what's happened, I – I'm not going to say I can – I can't remember specifically, but it feels to me that I wasn't told that this is what's going to happen. This is where things are going to go. Those were drastic, drastic changes, life changing moments, I think. And I don't think I was well informed. So when you see things changing now around you but you don't feel part of those changes that are being made for you, you just sort of think, where are these changes coming from, who can you trust and who can you say what to and what can you not say to people. Also there's been times when I've opened up to people and people – now I wasn't as wise and I wasn't as clued up and people really abused that, financially, lots and lots of different, different ways. So I think I – I sort of think that there's information that I can share but only if I'm strong in that category, I'm going to go out and share that information with people, but otherwise I'm not going to tell you. You don't need to know, sort of thing. Because you just don't know who's out there to hurt you. And people are horrible. They say one thing to your face and then they do something else behind your – behind your back. So you just wizen up in that context. So trust plays a huge, huge sort of role. But even now I – if I was to ever be in a situation, god forbid, to take children away from a family, I want to inform them of their rights. I will inform them, this is what's going to happen. I'll keep them sort of informed right throughout the whole decision making process rather than just doing it, sort of thing. Because a lot of the time people just think that it's okay for them to do it because these are children, they don't know nothing, but guess what, you're going to remember these moments for the rest of your life. They're not going to go away from you. And you need to be informed right through step one to step two, three, to how many other steps there goes, of what's happening at each stage. So yeah.

In terms of making friendships or relationships, do you find that trust becomes an issue or – how do you feel that you kind of respond in that sense?

Initially I didn't have many friends. And I do look back and I can say I blame myself for that because a lot of the time I was doing a lot of shit stirring, a lot of things where I was doing things just for attention seeking, because there's no other way of me knowing how to make friends. So it for me was an attention seeking thing. If one

person's gone against the other and I'm partnering up with this side and that side – just all sorts of little things that you do just to sort of get that attention. In terms of sort of now, in terms of trust – could you repeat the question?

Sorry, yeah. Basically what kind of impact do you feel that the – or how do you feel that you – in terms of relationships or friendships, how do you feel kind of your experiences with trust – how do you think that that shapes kind of how you interact with people or how you trust them?

I think now I'm a bit more careful in terms of who I talk to and in terms of – you sort of pick up now this – this skill that obviously – this comes with experience and you build up skills of – you know genuinely people that are there for you and help you and support you and guide you, and people that are there just to abuse you. And I still – I'm in a dilemma even up until today where I feel the need to help people, and people really start taking the piss with that, but then I do get myself into a conflict where I'm spending more time on them than I'm thinking about my own self. Like even in my class now at the moment, a lot of people feel like they – especially younger social work students feel that they can just now email me and they're starting in their assignment a week before it's due in and ask me on how to tackle the question. And they probably feel that they can take me for a ride in that context because they know I've done my work, sort of thing. I still find that difficult because I always – I'm not a person – I'm very open and big hearted in that context. I will go out my way to help whoever I can to whatever means it takes. So I'm not a person that backs down in that context. But I think I need to learn that there's only a certain amount that you can help somebody and people need to pull their own weight in that situation as well. You can't do everything for that person. And I'm in that dilemma even up until today because I feel that they – many people in my time are there to push me, help me, guide me, and I just feel that maybe sometimes I'll be that person in a way to do that for people. So it is tricky. It is very, very tricky. But in terms of making friends and that, I've made good friends and people that – who I can trust, who I can talk to. Obviously life experiences have taught me a lot, that you've got to be very selective of what information you obviously give out, because people will sort of hold it against

you and then really abuse it when the opportunity comes. So you've got to be careful in that context. Yeah.

[1:42:45]

You mentioned earlier as well, especially when you were in America, your education was severely disrupted. Were you able to make many friends in America, whether it was in school or like your neighbours?

My teachers loved me. They – I think because I've always been quite a genuine person in that sort of context. So my teacher – so – because I find it hard to socialise and people take the mick because my hair always used to be greasy and I used to smell. And then sometimes – 'cause this was with my dad and even our hygiene was really, really poor in terms of, like, looking after myself. I think people sort of didn't want to be my friend. So I would keep myself busy in terms of, like, cleaning and doing things like that at lunchtime and just keep myself busy doing something. So when I left from there, my teacher gave me a little teddy, a little penguin teddy. I've even got that up until today. It's in my cupboard, sitting there at home. So that was quite nice. I did make one or two good friends. I still remember them but obviously I haven't been in touch – didn't get that opportunity to be in touch with them. It would be nice if I knew where they were today. Even my carers, I would still want to go back and sort of get in touch if I possibly could. And maybe once I'm qualified and I've got a bit of money saved up, I might go back travelling to the States and go back to where I was and see if my carer's still there. Try my luck, why not? So in that context I made some – one or two good friends, people that – I hope they're doing well in their lives, wherever they are, because we – I think we all judge people in terms of their appearance and that's not everything always, I think. Because sometimes you can be really nice people. Okay, they might have a bad time or they're going through a bad time, but you can help them come out of that, sort of thing. So yeah, so I always – even somebody that looks really rough, I always treat them like they're a millionaire, because somewhere down the line they've got probably qualities and strengths that even I haven't even got. So it's about giving

people that respect regardless of where and how they come from. So that's all I know to what I think in life.

[14:22]

Do you think that your experiences in care have given you that insight? Do you think it's – do you think it's kind of shaped the way that you see things or the way that you – you kind of look at people? Do you feel that –

It's widened my knowledge, absolutely. It's definitely given me a greater insight into things that do happen and go on behind closed doors. So in that context, absolutely. In terms of looking at people, like I said, I've never mixed with, like, black people, so culture was a big, big thing. Sort of meeting professionals was another thing that probably wouldn't have happened to every other child, so that's an experience in itself, seeing how people up above you have so much power and control and have, like, these rights to make life changing – to make life changing sort of changes in your life. So yeah, it's definitely expanded – and, like I said, I have no regrets for whatever's happened in the past because I wouldn't be here today.

[1:46:05]

Okay. I'm going to go back again to your time in America. You said that when you told your teacher what was going on after your father beat you and kicked you, you said that that was the first time you'd told anybody.

Mm.

What do you think it was that kind of almost gave you that courage or perhaps that willingness to talk about it?

Like I said, my friend Jessica, we were having – because I used to go to breakfast club in the morning, because our school bus used to come early so we used to have breakfast before we went to lessons. I told her. I opened up to her. Because me and

her had a good relationship, again we'd sort of got to know each other. So I sort of said to her – a couple months now I'd known her now. I said, 'Let me talk to her and tell her what's happening.' She encouraged me to go and then talk to my teacher. She goes, 'It's wrong.' She really pushed me and said, 'Go, go and talk to Miss Winter.' But my teacher was just a lovely, lovely character, warm, loving, sort of – do you know like the teacher from Matilda? Yeah? A bit like her, very open, very caring, nurturing, loving. So I went and told her that's what happened. So from there things just sort of got to wherever they did, yeah.

Did you ever have any idea that what was happening to you wasn't necessarily happening to any – to everybody? Did you – let me rephrase this. Did you think that your experiences were what they would call normal? Do you know what I mean? Did you feel that everybody was experiencing similar things to you or did you ever feel that it was just you?

No I didn't. I just felt that it was us. Because you would see families – because obviously you're not blind, you're see – I see my teacher. She was pregnant, she had a child, she would talk about her child. She would share her experiences. She's taken her child here, there. And I used to feel really, really – I used to cry sometimes thinking, hold on, why didn't we have any of those sort of experiences. You would see adverts of toys and all sorts and you would think, okay, I want that, but you'll know you'll never ever sort of get it. So I sort of felt that it was just us. I didn't feel that it was happening to other people. I just felt that it's just us that's been given this. And I just felt that it was a test and trial sort of thing that we were having to go through. So yeah, I did feel really isolated. I didn't feel that there was many people that you can really go out and open up to and talk to until that point, obviously. And even my dad's friends and family, they – I was scared to tell any of them because – 'cause obviously they're my dad's friends and family. They'd probably come back and then my dad would be fuming. So you just had to really pick the right moment, I think, on who you told. And that was the right moment, I think. So yeah.

[1:49:09]

What were your thoughts or feelings towards his girlfriend?

... I never liked her. I felt that – my mum would always sleep in our room but then when she would come, she'd get to sleep in his room. So I – I felt that she's taking my – my mum's rights away. Those are my mum's rights and yet you're taking them away. And she almost had him under more control than my mum ever, ever could. My mum had no control over my dad. She had more control over him in terms of – if they wanted to go out shopping, she could go pick up a top, she could go pick up whatever she wanted and he'd buy it for her. My mum, to do that, no way, it's just not happening. Without any questions asked, this is not happening. So she was able to more sort of reign him in and sort of keep control on him and really tell him and have her own life at the same time as well. So I felt angry with her but then I always respected her in that context because she's doing her own thing and then she's doing – she's coming over here. Even though it's all wrong, I totally disagree with it, then I think somewhere down the line my mum could be blamed for that as well in a way. But then I don't know. I think my mum was looking for somebody to look after her rather than her – sometimes as a woman you can find yourself in different roles and that role wasn't obviously for my mum. She more wanted to be looked after than cared for and my dad obviously abused all of that. So that's it.

Did you have much interaction with his girlfriend? Like would you speak or, like, would you talk to each other or –

Yeah, we did speak. Erm, we wouldn't call her mum or anything. But she would come and take us out. She more had an influence on where we could go for our birthdays and stuff. She wasn't – she wasn't, like, a witch or anything. She would take us out and stuff. She would take us to Burger King, McDonald's and just go and do parties. So she had more of a sort of influence in terms of activities and stuff that we could do, which – my mum would never ever be able to tell my dad that, 'Oh, I want to take the kids here or there.' She would have all of that in terms of going out and stuff, yeah.

Did she have an idea what was happening in terms of the beatings and –

She knew, she knew. She would try stopping it. She would tell him that it's wrong. But then my dad being my dad, he wouldn't do it in front of her at times and then just do it after she's gone, so ... But I think there was a whole load of jealousy between her and my mum obviously, so she wouldn't mind when my mum would get beaten up. But when it was me and my brother she did have a bit of sympathy, I think.

Do you think your father ever hit his girlfriend, hit her?

No. No because she's educated. She knows her rights. She's not dumb. She knows – and he needed her more than she needed him is what I felt. Because he felt that he needed her for whatever reason, so he knew that he had to look after her, sort of thing. So yeah.

[1:52:21]

Okay. So then when you – [clears throat] sorry, excuse me. When your granddad paid for your tickets to come back over to England, you said that you – you weren't kind of picked up for the first couple of years. You went undetected, as such. Why do you think that was?

... I don't know. I really – I really don't know. I mean, there just – just is no answer to it. I don't think there was any liaising as such in terms of professionals that were in America when they were obviously sending us back here. Something should have been done, a call or even an email to the services here to say that, look, the children have left from our care here, that they're in Britain now, they're residents of Britain and that maybe help and support needs to be put in in terms of the family arrangements. But then also I think my family also had a big influence, in terms of my dad's family. They were sort of there just to make sure things were okay, running to means – sort of means – needs – as long as our daily needs and stuff were met. They sort of made sure things were okay. But after that, obviously they can't control us going to school and all of that, so things sort of just went downhill and then that's when we got sort of picked up, that – and we weren't going to school and we should

be in school. Our grades weren't coming up to the standards that they should have been at. We were coming in in a bad state, sometimes not fed and stuff. Basically more neglect than abuse as such from my mum's end. So then they sort of then got involved. And then they saw a real difference once we went into care in terms of academically, in terms of who I was and in terms of making – me making friends. Before I was just quite isolated and just keep myself to myself and then all of a sudden, Year 10 or 11, when I was in care, things – I started to do really, really well. And those are the two years I remember being really good of high school, but before that a living hell, high school, it was horrible. I remember we didn't used to want to go in. We used to want to bunk because people were taking the piss. There were all sorts of horrible things happening at high school at that time. And I was thinking, I can't take anybody back. And you know peer pressure and all sorts, you don't feel like you're living up to what everybody else is sort of doing. So yeah.

Did you have anybody in school when you came back over here that you could talk to, any friends like your friend in America? Do you have anybody –

See, a lot of the children that went to the primary school that I went from, they went to the same high school, so they did still remember me. But I used to get teased 'cause of the accent I used to have, 'cause of the American accent. They used to always take the – take the mickey. But then again, those are the people that bullied me when I was in primary school. So I still felt intimidated, still felt that – that bit scared – like – it's like, you've seen these people in childhood, now you're a bit grown up and you're still seeing – having to face them again. Have they changed? Are they still going to be horrible towards you? Because I used to get beaten up in, like, cloakrooms when we were younger and stuff in primary school. So things like that. So I felt very, very scared. But those were the people then I made – ended up being really good friends with in Year 10 and 11. But there was other people that I've never met before that I made good friends with, three – three friends. And the girl that – we didn't stay in touch from high school until college. We were in touch in high school but not in college and afterwards. She's doing an OT course at my university now. But she – so she almost like mothers me in a way, I think. She's my age. But she tells me, 'I'm so proud of you for being at university.' She goes, 'I

remember life was so hard for you.’ So she remembers the times when I was in the ditch at that time. So she – she’s still there and she sort of says hello and she still speaks to me, but she remembers what I was going through at that time, I think. So it’s nice in a way, I think, that at least somebody acknowledges that life’s not be easy. And she goes, ‘I’m so proud of you that you’re here today.’ And she was really happy to see me at uni. Yeah, so I’m really happy to keep on seeing her afterwards, yeah.

[1:56:40]

And the – so when you were doing your GCSEs, how did you find that? Because obviously, what with having the broken education and then to sit down and have to do important exams, how did you find that whole process?

I kept going. I didn’t do well. I’m not going to lie, I didn’t do well at all. But I think the teachers were strict. The teachers were good and I got put into like a special class with other children that were doing really bad. So we got to do – our class – even though we were called the dumb class, we got to do different things. Like we did the Duke of Edinburgh Award, which – I did my bronze award, twenty-five miles we did on that, so that’s something good. I’ve still got the certificates. We did a drug awareness magazine. There was lots of opportunities that opened up in Year 10 and 11 afterwards. But I did find my GCSEs a struggle. I did find them hard. I didn’t find that I – I look at some of the children now, they’re revising, they’re spending so much time. I didn’t – I don’t think I did anywhere near as much. For me to walk away with two or three Cs and Ds, I think I did alright. And then I didn’t realise I had dyslexia until I got to uni this year, so that’s another thing that I didn’t realise that I didn’t have no help and support for that from, like, high school. We would see somebody one to one but that was more just to talk and – talk about things, how things are going. Because everybody knew in the school that we were in care. All the teachers knew that that’s what’s happening in the home. So everybody knew about what was happening. So that was – even though it’s meant to be support with work and stuff, we were more just talking things through and how things are going and stuff. Exams, I’ve never really particularly liked them. I don’t think I still do but, I

mean, just get on with it. And I think it was more – stability at that time was the key sort of word. I had that stability so I just kept going, I think, for the sake of just going, really. ‘Cause I knew I wanted to go to college and stuff, so I did go to college. And doors just sort of opened up. And then you had good teachers that would push you and then sort of said to you, ‘You can do it,’ and gave you that encouragement just to do well. So yeah.

[1:59:00]

How did it make you feel – you said – sorry, you said that everybody knew that you were in care, the other students and the teachers. How did that make you feel?

I think I was quite happy. I’ll tell you why, because it was something different. It’s like all eyes on you, sort of thing. And like I said, I was very – I was a person that was – I was an attention seeker. I’m not going to lie, I was a huge attention seeker, so any opportunity to make your – make myself look different and a bit bigger, I would – I would make – so I’d take the opportunity – I was an opportunist. So basically I – it didn’t bother me. Because you had the teachers supporting you, teachers running around after you, teachers making sure you were doing well, so things were put into place. You were treated special, I think, and that’s what I remember, being treated special. And I think I wanted that, because nobody would want to know me before and all of a sudden everybody wants to know me, sort of thing. So what the heck, sort of thing. So yeah.

Because it’s like, I mean, almost going from, you know, not having that attention – ‘cause you mentioned earlier how your mother gave a lot of attention to your brother. So it’s almost like you’ve gone from not having that attention, not having that focus on you –

I got no attention when I was younger whatsoever. You – you were expected to do everything but when it came to love, attention, cuddles, kisses, hugs, all of that, that was never, never, never, never there. So ...

So would you say that your experience of that has then made you kind of – you know, then almost helped your transition into an attention seeker, as you put it, like when you were younger?

Yeah, definite, yeah. Because I mean, if – if I wouldn't get the attention positively, I'm going to go out of my means and go and do something really, really negative to go and get that attention, absolutely. I would do anything and everything just to get hold of particular people's attention, because to me they seemed – they were people that were doing well, they were up there, so I wanted their attention. And then for me to get that, if I have to go through a positive mean, be it, negative, be it. There was no sort of I'm going to do this and I'm going to do this through a good way. Either way, I would take both opportunities either way to go and get that person's attention if I wanted to. So yeah.

It's interesting to see the impact that care and, you know, childhood experiences has. You also mentioned during your GCSEs you didn't – you said that you focused on them and you knew you wanted to go to college. And you mentioned again earlier that your granddad was very education kind of focused. When you were doing your GCSEs, who was there supporting you or pushing you, aside from the teachers? Who was there to kind of push you towards college and further education?

Not – it was only the teachers I remember, the teachers. Because the class that we were in, the teachers were all the key – key sort of focus in terms of telling us, go out there and do well. Those teachers really built up a relationship with us because they went with us on the Duke of Edinburgh Award and they did things with us. So the teachers that did push me are the ones that I'd had good, very good, relationships with in terms of just generally through they knew I was in care and my overall experience. So I remember social workers being – but I never remember social workers promoting education as such. Because I remember social workers coming and tick boxing things, ticking things away, filling out paperwork and that's it, they're gone [laughs]. My foster carer, again, she was more of a person that would take – she made me an ID to get into clubs and stuff, so not a person that would sort of promote education for us. But then her daughter now, on the other hand, Natasha's ten, she was doing her

Eleven Plus, I'm not sure if you've heard of it, to get into grammar school and stuff, and for her daughter education was key. But I would see the importance of her pushing her daughter and I would think to myself, okay, maybe she's not giving it to me but I need to do well myself just to get into the door of different things. And in terms of education, I think I've always had a passion somewhere down the line for education. Because even when I was young, young, young and my granddad being around but not – not a huge influence, but him saying that the books – like a piece of paper – he'll never allow us to put anything down on the floor. He'd go anything with writing, it's a piece – it's like a Bible basically, to give a respect on the terms that you would give, like the actual Bible or any sacred sort of text. So he sort of – for me to kick a book with my feet, he would always tell me, 'Go and pick it up with your hands and put it on something high. Keep it up on a high shelf.' So he had a lot of respect for education. And I think he was the oldest man in this – he went to college to educate himself, to learn how to read, write and stuff. His writing is neater than mine today. So he's been a person that's always said, 'Respect education,' and I think that was sort of ingrained within me when I was quite young. So I remember looking after my textbooks from when I was younger. Even I've got my high school books up until today. So he's always sort of taught – I remember, even though there wasn't much space in the house, me putting my textbooks into a carrier bag and just keeping it in the conservatory at the back, things like that. So yeah, so it's just general childhood experiences and teachers that pushed me to sort of just go on and do well, I think. And somewhere down the line I think I've always had that passion myself anyways, which a lot of people probably don't, but I've had that passion for education when I was young anyways. So yeah.

Female: We've had another hour already.

Oh, already.

Female: So is it alright for us to break?

Are you happy to break?

Yeah, I think that's sort of – yeah, that's finished. Yeah, that's fine.

Yeah? Okay.

[Break]

[2:04:48]

Okay. So again, before the break you mentioned that when you were in school people knew that you were in care. Do you feel that they had, you know, a certain perception of you? Or how did you feel that they treated you because you were in care?

I think they treated – they did treat me differently, but I think somewhere down the line there was a lot of acknowledgement that I needed that help in a way and that support. Because they knew that there was a lot of crisis and suffering at home so they sort of said that I deserved it in a way, that somebody's there to help and support me as a person. In terms of – when I used to go back and see my mum, I think, at home, they – the neighbours would laugh and make a mockery as if to say that she's a bad mother and that she's been incapable and she's not been able to look after me and my brother in a way. I think that's the saddest part because that's the community you've been brought up in and with, and for them to be like that, I think that's the saddening part of all of it, I think, for me. In terms of high school and stuff, I think it was okay. I made it sound positive, me being me. Even though there were things that were going round but I just made it sound bigger than what it was and just show off and say to people, 'Look, I've got lots of pocket money, which you probably don't,' and this, that, the other, just to make it that little bit more better and for people to sort of think of it as a nice thing rather than a bad thing. So that's how I always sort of wanted to portray it and even I did when I was at high school. So I never portrayed it as being a bad thing, that it was okay.

[2:06:35]

Yeah. For people that haven't been in care or, you know, haven't been adopted, haven't kind of been involved in that care system, what do you think their opinion is of those that have been in care?

I've heard a lot of negative comments. I've heard that people say that care – care – sort of care – people in care are not going to do well in life. They're going to stay on the benefits, they're going to sort of being scroungers and they're going to do really bad in life and not generally hope anything for these young people. Because they just that they've had such a broken background, that they're not any – they're not of any good basically to society and like they're going to do really bad in general. Even when I was part of my own research for the young person that I was supporting in care, the statistics are crazy. They're saying, like, females within the care system are three times more likely to become pregnant at a young age, became a teenage mother basically, compared to any other young person. So statistics makes it sound really, really bad, I think, somewhere down the line. And the way the media portrays it as well, it portrays it really, really wrongly, doesn't it? But the way I think things need to be looked at is the fact that they're not there because they want to be there. Things have obviously gone wrong somewhere down the line and they've had to then be put into that situation. So just – that's pretty much it on that.

[2:08:08]

If you could – now this is obviously hypothetical. If you could go back in time and tell yourself as a child – if you could give yourself one piece of advice, what do you think that piece of advice would be?

Wow. If I was in care?

Yeah.

And I was to go and give –

It's, again, completely – you know, if you could go back in time and tell yourself one piece of advice.

I would say, get to know your rights. And I think that would just help. It would set your foundations so strong, that nobody can take – take advantage of your situation, really. If you know your rights, your entitlements to things, you can then fight for yourself, for what's rightly yours in a way, isn't it? And I don't think a lot of young people in care know their rights and there's not enough advice and information given to them. And when it is given to them it's either too late and the times and deadlines and whatnot have just passed by. So it's about really getting to know and getting to grips with what – sort of understanding what is rightfully yours in a way, I think, and understanding what your rights are and what your rights aren't. Because sometimes social workers and professionals will make decisions for you rather than you getting involved in the decision making process. Sometimes you don't have to agree to them but because you feel almost grateful for their help and support, you feel that you almost have to go along with these decisions that are being made for you even though your heart might not be in them. So that's what I would say. I would say, get to know your rights, get your foundation nice and strong and it will guide you indirectly in what's rightfully yours, in a way.

[2:09:52]

You said before that control is – has been quite a big thing, like, again, that social workers have, you know, made decisions for you, have controlled your life and you felt like you've had no kind of input. Do you feel now that that kind of experience of control has affected the way that you perhaps control your life now or help others?

Definite, because – okay, what I might think is right for you might not be your view that that's right for you at that time. And I think, with my own profession now, obviously I'm going into practice as a social worker and I've done lots of work experience, given the client the choice. And sometimes maybe I don't agree with what they're sort of saying that they want to do, but you have to go with the flow and you sometimes have to let people learn from their mistakes. Because I myself was

told by so many different people but then you get to a point where so many people keep telling you, you want to rebel against everything that everybody's told you and then you completely end up doing the opposite. So sometimes not telling people can be good because they can learn from their own mistakes and sometimes you have to accept that. And I think sometimes we know that what that person's doing is wrong but, guess what, you're going to have to let them go through it and they're going to have to learn from that mistake, that, okay, maybe what I was told was right but I've done it on my own and I've got to where I am. So there's no regrets, no – that person can't hold you responsible, I think, for sort of taking control. You've been in control of that situation yourself. So I sort of try to put it in my day to day practice, letting people sort of take control of what they think is right and what's wrong. Sometimes I agree, sometimes I don't agree, but, hey, they're going to have to learn. There's only a certain amount that you can do as an individual, guide and push them, and the overall decision has to be theirs, I think. It is difficult, I'm not going to say it's not, but then you've got to think from their perspective that, do you really want somebody dictating your life to you, sort of thing. So yeah.

[2:12:10]

Obviously you said earlier that you're looking to go into, you know, social work and you've gained a lot of skills and life experiences. What do you think will be the key things that you can take from your experience that will help you in your role as a social worker?

When I was obviously younger, I was fourteen, I went through a lot of counselling sessions. I spoke about my own sort of experience as what happened. At that time, very, very emotional, very, very – sort of just getting into touch with all these hidden problems and emotions that I had and really coming in to terms with it. I think it took me three years over my high school period, just talking to someone. Okay, there were people that – there were different people all the time. That wasn't helpful obviously. It would be nice to just have somebody ongoing, because you have to keep repeating yourself. And even a lot of the times that I would find, like, with social workers, they would never read up on your case file because they're so overly loaded. And then

they'll come into you and then you've got to open up your life story book to them over and over again. And I'm thinking, hold on a minute, have you done no reading on me whatsoever? Am I just another case number that's come across to you, that's been allocated to you and you expect me to come – and that's why I think a lot of the trust issue comes in, that I didn't want to trust social workers because you end up having to open up your life story to them every single time and it's just becoming – but I think that it helped as well indirectly because you obviously spoke about your emotion, you spoke about what's happening in life. So it's had its negatives and its good – good sides. So I went through it, so hence to why I'm not becoming so emotional in this video session, sort of having all that counselling over the years has helped, definite. And I think even going into the profession I want to go into, I'm going to have to probably go back for counselling just to sort of look at my own experiences and to see that they don't sort of conflict in my practice, because I think that can be very easily done. So sometimes you've got to really step back and think that, okay, my experience was my experience. This person's experience is their experience and you've got to let them live through it, sort of thing. And sometimes you can see them making that mistake and going through the same thing you're going through, but you've got to really grit your teeth and hold back and just think, stop one minute, let them take control, let them be the person that goes through it, not – and sometimes you put yourself into it. And it's so difficult but I suppose you just have to sort of let it happen, isn't it?

[2:14:43]

So when you had the counselling, you said over – was it a period of three years?

Over three years, yeah.

How old were you roughly when you started the counselling?

I think I was about fourteen, fifteen.

So was that around the same time – you said before that you were – I think you used the words – was it in a bad place, and that’s when you decided to do the overdose?

Yeah.

So did you start the counselling after the attempted overdose?

Yeah.

Okay. And were you in –

Foster care.

Yeah. Which carer, sorry? Just to clarify, which foster placement were you in?

That was with the Asian family that I was with at that time. And that’s probably the second longest placement that I was in over that time. But things were just going really wrong and I just felt like I need to talk to people. I was really scared though initially, counselling, like what the heck does this mean. But my teacher recommended it and I went for a first session. They go, ‘Go for like a taster session, see how it goes.’ And I think the counsellor was really good because they’re not going to judge you, they’re not going to say anything. It’s just the way you’re just speaking, I think. So I think there’s probably a lot of negative stuff attached to if you need counselling. But I think it’s also just a good way – somebody that doesn’t know you, a good way of you just relieving your stress and just getting out what’s on your chest without somebody making any sort of comments or judgements. And a lot of the times you think that you could do that with your friends but then they’ve always got something to say about it or you don’t want to offend them and you can’t really open up as such. But with counselling obviously you can just open up and say whatever’s on your chest and how you want to say it and that person’s just there to listen to you. And then even in the end, again it’s your decision that you make in that they will – they won’t guide you from right to wrong, they’ll just say to you, it’s your decision. So they’ll sort of try to clarify whatever you’re trying to think to guide you

which way your brain sort of – and heart's going towards. So never ever did I find the counsellor making my decision for me. They told me that you've sort of made the decision but I think you just need to come to terms with it and understand that that's the decision that you have come up with, but you just need to be strong and be firm. Yeah, so yeah.

[2:17:00]

During those sessions, how did it make you feel, discussing issues from your past and your childhood perhaps that you might not have discussed previously? How did it make you feel kind of almost digging that back up and reliving it?

Very difficult. Because I remember I used to keep – to keep myself busy I used to have chewing gum in my mouth and the chewing gum – because I used to cry so much, the chewing gum used to absorb and you could just literally swallow it in your mouth. It was really, really tearful. But I had no regrets because I think – hence to why I've become such a stronger person to talk about my experience now. And I don't – I mean, at that time I was thinking, what the heck am I doing, sort of thing, talking to this person, telling them what's happened, but sometimes you need to get in touch with what's happened and understand so that you don't end up doing it yourself to other people. Because if you don't talk about them sort of things then you might end up doing that. Like I could easily turn round and abuse my son then because I might not have understood that what I did was – what's happened to me was wrong. And so I'm glad that I went for it because I'm glad that I haven't done it to my own son, obviously, just to know what is right and what's wrong. So it helps you clarify a lot of your own emotions and to accept and to come in terms with a lot of things, because that's difficult, I think, in itself. I find it very difficult to come to terms – and like I said, I never came to terms with my mum's mental illness – even though I was told that she's ill, I never came into terms with it until I was twenty-three, last year I think, yeah, when she fell really ill. So sometimes you have to see things happening in reality until you're a bit older for you to sort of accept that, okay, it is what it is. People saying it sometimes is not just enough. For me, I'm one of them people where

people telling me things is no good. I have to sort of see it happening for me to go on to believe it. So yeah.

Female: We've got eleven minutes to go.

Okay, thank you.

[22:58]

With all of your experiences that you've had, do you think that you will tell your son kind of your experiences and what you've been through?

I'm scared and I'll tell you why, because I think – I'm scared that my son might want to hold it against me if one day I will tell him off, 'Oh, I'm going to go and report you to social services. You're a bad mother.' I think as a parent you're so conscious of things that could be said and made – allegations and accusations that could be made against you, so you're scared. Even – so I try to meet all his needs and try to be as good a mum. Still somewhere down the line I underestimate my own capabilities and whether I've still done right by him or not. I'm still always questioning myself, am I a good mother. Because obviously he's going to have to sacrifice with me but he – he's sacrificing at the moment obviously because I'm not able to give him my all, with me studying, looking after my mum, the house commitments. Everything's all on my shoulders so it's a lot to take on board and he's probably feeling at the grit of it because he's probably the youngest and he's not feeling that I'm giving him my all and my attention and I'm not there for him as much as I should be. So it is difficult but I think I will have to explain it to him because obviously my sisters being in care, he's not understanding why they're there and why he's with me and my mum and my brother and why his dad – he still finds it very confusing why his dad's not there, why he sees his dad every so often. A lot of questions but I do try talking to him. And I sort of decided that I will tell him when the time comes right and I'm planning on doing some sort of life story work books with him. And I show him lots of pictures. And I've encouraged contact with the dad. Even though his dad's done what he's done to me, I've said to him it's important that – I said to myself that it's important

that he has his male figure. Because I remember obviously me not having a male figure, it's disrupting me so badly, so I don't want him going through that. So I want him to still have a good relationship with his dad regardless of what's happened between me and him. That's his dad still and I'm not anybody to be snatching that away from him. So I'm being quite mature about it, I think.

[2:21:11]

Since becoming a parent, has it kind of helped you to understand certain things or perhaps certain ways that your parents behaved? Has it helped to, I don't know, give you a better kind of understanding of the way that they were or ...?

Most definite in terms of – I've taught my son now to be culturally very sensitive to all cultures, religions, regardless of skin colour and age or disability. These are the things that were never ever taught to us. Very – I was very sheltered, is the word I can use, very, very sheltered. Even people up till now sometimes sort of say, 'You've had a child but you're still so naïve.' When it comes to, like, topics like sex and stuff, sex and education and stuff, I'm still very, very naïve and very gullible and naïve, I think. So I think I – I'm going to open him up to all the different sorts of things. I'm not going to enclose him as such. So I – I've got him into gymnastics. He goes every Saturday. I'm going to get him into karate. So I'm opening him up to loads and loads of different things so he gets the gist of mixing with different kinds of people, because I'm going to help him to become a different person. And already his teachers say that he's so confident and he speaks a lot and he speaks his mind, so it's going to help him to become that person that I hopefully would have liked to become at maybe a younger age and do well. So hopefully I'll put that in him now from a young age. Let's see where he goes.

[2:22:36]

When you kind of look at your son –

Yep.

Where do you see him, or where do you hope for him to be when he's older, perhaps when he's your age now? Where do you –

I've sort of told him, the sky's the limit. Reach for everything you basically get hold of. He's not too keen – he's very, very creative, so I'm more going in the flow of what he – he likes rather than – it's so easy to push as a parent, i.e. this is what I want you to do, but I'm going with the flow, what he sort of enjoys and what he doesn't. So it's just to see where he goes in life with whatever he does. Because no point in me pushing him into something that I want him to do and then he doesn't enjoy it at the end. And I think that's what I was – I was always sort of told to go and become a doctor, to go and do something, so the nearest – because of my GCSEs not coming up to – the nearest I could do was to get into nursing. But did I really want to be there? No. So that's the kind of things, I'm trying to shorten – sort of make sure that I'm not going to do with my son is that I enforce what I think is right. I sort of just – I always tell him that whatever you're going to do – even if you want to become a cleaner, make sure you're the best at that job, even if it is to become a cleaner. I don't know what he wants to do in life. He tells me that he wants to become a fireman at the moment. And let's see where life takes him. He's very creative. So I'll always tell him his skills and his abilities and I try and push him into that direction and tell him, 'Look, that this is what you hold as a person and this is the kind of job that will match it sort of really well.' So let's see where it takes him.

[2:24:05]

Yeah. So you said before as well, I think, right back at the beginning, obviously you're studying, you've got your son, you look after your mother and you also work. Would you like to tell me a little bit about where you're working at the moment?

Okay. I work for Caremed Recruitment Agency, but from them I've done so many different, different jobs, because it's an agency, they've opened me up to loads and loads of different roles. So I've been a contact supervisor for them. I've worked as a receptionist for an SEN school, which is a special educational needs school. But my

mum was really ill. They did offer for me to stay for quite a long time but I couldn't keep that job as a receptionist. I've also done exam invigilation from them. So I've worked at a parenting assessment unit in Croydon for them. And the – I've been three years at the – it's a residential support unit, a respite provider for parents who have disabled children, from ten to eighteen year olds, and I've been there for the last three years. But I think – because I feel so happy and you sort of feel settled down in the environment, I'm quite happy. And I've sort of been there – the managers sort of given me regular shifts every week. So I'm there pretty much four days a week now, I do overnights. It's just opened up a whole different chapter, I think, in terms of disability, people you wouldn't even sort of see as society, that when you take them out now you really see people looking at you, giving you dirty looks and all sorts of things. And I'm thinking, you don't know anything about people with disability, sort of thing. So it's really widened my knowledge in that context. And I'm in touch with a lot of the social workers that come, because the social workers come to see the children as well, so it's a good way of networking. I'm a firm believer in networking. I just think that if you – the more circle of people you know, the better it is long term because you never know who can help you to get wherever. So I always pass my details on and I sort of talk to everybody and anybody. So the -I was recruiting social workers in learning disability. So if I am still here for the next three years, that would have been about six years of me being in learning disability, I'll probably easily get a job at the local borough as a learning disability social worker. And so I reckon that's where I'm heading at the moment. But obviously I've still got placements to come. My agency's also said that I can – they've proposed that I can do bank, internal bank work for them, so that's an adults team. That's opened up. So opportunities are just coming. But I think I'll sort of see where life takes me with them in that context. So let's see. So yeah, that's sort of where I am at the moment with learning disabilities and contact work. Those are skills I obviously built up as well. That helped because obviously when I go to see my sisters, I know what the role of a contact supervisor is and what they can and can't do. Because sometimes contact supervisors can be really, really mean and try and force upon you what they think is right again and as family, sometimes you think that they're superior and they know what they're doing, sort of thing. But no, that's not always the case. So I'm glad that I've got that experience on board as well, so that helps. So the contact workers know – I don't tell them that I am

– been – but I know what my rights are as an individual. So sort of then again, I'm saying again, it's really important to get to know your rights again and what you are entitled to. So yeah.

[2:27:40]

I think are we – yeah, okay, yeah. So we're obviously coming towards the end of the interview now. Just to kind of round things off, obviously you've given us some fantastic information today so I'd like to thank you for that.

Thank you.

Just one last small question.

Yep.

If you were to kind of define your experience in care, perhaps – I don't know, just maybe even a couple of words. If you were to define the impact that your care experience has had on you, what kind of – what definition would you give it, or how would you summarise it?

That's difficult.

It's a broad question.

It's very, very broad, because I've had both good and bad experiences. I've had both good and bad social workers. I've had professionals that love their job dearly and do anything and everything to meet your needs and they'll try to go out of their way to help you, and there's people that are just lazy and they don't want to do nothing and they're just there for the wrong reasons. So – gosh. For me, like I said initially, I have no regrets through going through the bad and the good times of being in care. It's made me who I am today and not for anything will I change going through what I went through because I want to be who I am today and hence to why I am sort of here

today. And it's made me become that stronger and sort of richer person and a person that – that hopefully will make changes for the generations behind me to come. So let's see, hopefully I succeed in obviously making that change. But yeah.

That's wonderful. Thank you.

Thank you very much.

Thank you for taking part. It's been a pleasure.

No problem. Thank you very much.

Thank you.

[End of Transcript][2:29:29]