



# THE VOICE PROJECT PRESENTS

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## *Becky's Story*

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A unique opportunity to hear the story of a  
Care Experienced Young Person from  
Staffordshire



My name is Sian Baker, I work at The Voice Project as a Consultation and Engagement Coordinator, and over the last several months I have been working with our young people to gain insight into their care experience. The young people who have spoken to me as part of this project been open and honest about what being in care has meant to them and their lives for their past, present as well as their future.

With their permission, I would now like to share their stories with you...

## Becky's Story

I met with Becky on a November day in her house, where she lives with her daughter and partner. Becky is 21 years old, living independently in Staffordshire and, at the time, was studying at university. We sat in her living room and spoke about her care experience and the journey this took her on, as well as the impact that being in care had on her growing up. Under the pseudonym of Becky, this young person, also talked to me about what life is like as a Care Leaver, the support she has received as well as what she hopes the future has in store. Finally, Becky shared with me what she would tell her 15-year old self, and what she would tell a child coming in to care now.

### **'Your parents don't love you'**

Becky spoke about her intermittent time in care as an adolescent, with one of the reasons for this being her Mum's poor mental health. Becky shared her experience of living in a few different homes, the first of which being a Family and Friends arrangement. Becky reflected that this wasn't the best situation she could have found herself in, saying that part of her was relieved when this broke down, meaning she moved to live in a fostering household. Throughout Becky's time in care, she reflected

that she was constantly thinking of what she could have done differently, she gave an example of running away when a Social Worker was due to visit and take her from her family home.

When sharing her experience of working with professionals, Becky reflected that there had been good Social Workers, but there had also been bad ones. Becky told me that she had a Social Worker for some time who listened to her and helped get Becky out of the Family and Friends arrangement she referred to as 'terrible', however later found out this Social Worker had passed away. Becky also spoke of her experience of settling in to live with a Foster Carer who she wishes could have adopted them, despite acknowledging the loyalty she will always feel towards her Mum. Becky shared that she still has a really close relationship with this Foster Carer having offered her support over the years and that her daughter even refers to her as 'Nanny'. Becky reflected on feeling lucky to have met her and still have her in her life to this day.

Becky reflected on the negative impact being 'Looked after' had on them at school, referring to comments made by her peers including; 'your parents don't love you'. Furthermore, Becky shared that she felt that being in care made her school experience more difficult. Becky shared that alongside this, a lot of her thoughts revolved around 'is Mum okay?' as she had supported her Mum as a young carer prior to coming into care, so she felt there had always been a lot of upheaval in respect to her education. Becky reflected on the support she received from The Virtual School which started when she were in year 10, saying that it was very helpful, but that she wished it could have started earlier, rather than when she had already started her GCSEs.

### ***'My childhood was taken away from me'***

In reference to life outside of school, Becky reflected on the positive impact her time in care had offered, this included opportunities to go abroad with one Foster Carer, as well as the realisation as to why she could not go 'home' even though this was what she wanted. Becky shared that this understanding led her to realise what she wanted out of life at an earlier age than her peers. Unfortunately, this awareness came at a cost, as Becky told me; 'my childhood was taken away from me in a sense'. Becky reflected on feeling the unfairness of seeing families together through the windows of houses she would drive past, wondering why those children were at home with family when she could not be. When discussing the labels 'Looked after Child' and 'Care Leaver', Becky shared that she felt she was treated differently, giving the example of not being able to go to friends' houses after school. Becky reflected on having to go through Social Workers, or wait until her Looked after Review, to ask whether she could visit friend's houses, whereas all her friends were just able to go.

Becky also told me about the move to semi-independence, sharing that it happened earlier than planned, but that her Foster Carer was going on holiday and rather than moving into another foster for this time to then move into semi-independence in the coming months, she made the decision to move at that time so there was only one transition. Despite making this decision, Becky said she was 17 and felt petrified at the prospect of moving into semi-independence.

### ***'I was really scared of being on my own'***

Becky told me that before moving into independence, she were offered a few different accommodations, including a three-bedroom house and a hostel which she was cautious about, saying she knew some of the people living there. Becky reflected that she feels this is a real issue for other young people leaving care, saying that whilst she didn't go down the path of drugs and

alcohol, this is not an uncommon risk for vulnerable young people to experience. In the end, Becky moved into a flat she described as 'nice', despite being located on the opposite side of the town, which was unfamiliar to her. Moving to an area Becky did not know well left her feeling isolated and excluded, reflecting that although the 15 hours of support per week she received was really useful, 15 hours is not very much when you spread it across the space of a week. Becky shared that she 'stupidly' allowed her partner to stay in the flat with her a lot of the time, which she now reflects was due to feeling isolated. It was at this stage, that Becky shared that the relationship with her partner was unhealthy with elements of domestic violence within it, which she can now reflect on but at the time she saw this as a normal relationship. Becky told me that, at the time, she believed that the abuse she experienced from her partner was deserved, and that it was her fault. She recalled feeling 'very vulnerable' during this time. Despite this, Becky displayed a really positive outlook on her lived experience, telling me that she focuses on the positives, and that her partner 'gave' her their daughter. A positive aspect to moving into independence was that Becky's brother, who was still in foster care at the time, could come and stay with Becky for a few nights, which they reflected on fondly.

Becky also reflected that when first moving into independence they experienced feelings of denial in respect to the responsibility that was gained alongside the freedom. At first, Becky shared that this contributed to her becoming depressed during this time of her life. When discussing the impact of moving into independence on her mental health, Becky shared that they had some support from Sustain once a month, but that this was not enough, and she struggled with the motivation to attend these support sessions. As well as her personal experience of poor mental health whilst leaving care, Becky told me she believes this is an issue for all Care Experienced young people which is often left unaddressed. She states that young people in a similar position to her, as well as herself, have mental health needs as a result of the time spent in care as well as leaving care which can often be traumatic. Becky told me that she is currently receiving support for her mental health, sharing she is currently undergoing assessments for PTSD, alongside receiving support in respect of the trauma she experienced within the Friends and Family arrangement, as well as moving out of foster care and into semi-independence. In general Becky reflects that she didn't receive appropriate support for her mental health whilst under the care of the local authority, and that she feels this is also the case for other children and young people, including her brother. When discussing the time in her life when Becky experienced domestic abuse, she shared that when living in the semi-independent accommodation, Becky would try and avoid any visits to the home because of damage to the property. Becky said that it was not a challenge to put off these visits, reflecting that her Support Worker was 'oblivious' and her Social Worker only visited the home once during her time in the semi-independent accommodation.

Becky told me of the good relationships between herself and her Personal Advisor, however reflected that they thought she was limited by her capacity. Becky shared that she felt her Personal Advisor would have done a lot more if she could have. Becky spoke about the support she receives currently as a result of remaining in full time education; saying her Personal Advisor contacts her around once a year to touch base and 'give me money' for books. When reflecting on how this support had changed once Becky turned 21, she said that she was gutted as she found the support of the Personal Advisor invaluable. Underlying Becky's care experience is the impression of increased awareness of the circumstances which led her to be cared for. Becky was very reflective in sharing her experiences, whilst also acknowledging that even negative experiences helped to rationalise why she could not have remained at home and understanding this from the perspective of her safety. This had a profound impact on Becky's life as she demonstrated throughout this conversation, but

also within her life in a broader sense, as she told me she was studying at university with the hope of specialising in Children's Services in the future.

## ***'Feel what you feel'***

When asked what advice she would give to her 15-year-old self, Becky simply replied that 'there is light at the end of the tunnel, even if its gonna take a while'. Becky shared that this is something her Social Worker said to her, and that she held this close to her heart, despite not particularly believing it at the time. Regarding a child or young person coming into care now, Becky said that she would advise: 'feel what you feel, you're allowed to feel it'. Becky also emphasised on the temporary nature of coming into care, saying that this does not put a stop to a child or young person's future. Becky shared that in 10 years, she hopes to be working with Children in Care and a Mum to a bigger family. When summing up her care experience, Becky said it had been a nightmare and a blessing, sometimes at the same time.

I would like to thank Becky again for spending an afternoon with me and for sharing her story with such candour. She gave me an insight into her experience and, in doing so, demonstrated true resilience. I wish her all the best for the future.

If you want to read more, the full transcript is available, please email [cvp@staffordshire.gov.uk](mailto:cvp@staffordshire.gov.uk) and we will share this with you. Also, if you know a care experienced young person who would like to share their journey, please get in touch with us using the email address above.