

Appendix 1 Case Study of R (now aged 25)

Background and Initial Presentation

R came into care as a young child and grew up with a foster family. When R was a teenager, his friend was fatally shot in front of him. R says he has experienced feelings of guilt and intense anger ever since.

R was introduced to staff from Brent Care Journeys (BCJ) when in his early twenties, on the recommendation his Personal Advisor (PA), in the summer of 2020. His PA was concerned about the impact of COVID and resulting isolation on his mental health. When project workers first met R they were aware of his depression; he shared information that challenges with his mental health were long standing. Pre-dating engagement with BCJ, R was involved in the criminal justice system – both on remand and in prison as a young adult.

In conversation with BCJ staff R identified that meeting up with people and keeping busy was a positive measure for him. However, he quickly told staff that he didn't like being with other young people in groups as this can make him feel anxious.

R's foster carers left the UK when he became a care leaver; this seems to have compounded a sense of loss for him.

Initial involvement with R made project workers aware that he was struggling with living in poverty.

Activity

In the first instance BCJ staff would regularly engage R by phone, to chat and catch up. This was important to earn his trust and to get to know him better. After a while R began to express his gratitude for the communication, saying "an angel heard my cry". He told staff that he felt valued and that someone was listening. He also seemed to value how relaxed and informal the relationship was.

During acute periods of the pandemic in 2020, R was highlighted as someone who would benefit from Barnardo's fundraising campaigns. At various points he was given food vouchers and during Ramadan he enjoyed a delivery of a special meal. He was also given a laptop.

In September 2020 R was encouraged to accept a place on the BCJ residential camping trip. He was very anxious in the days building up to the trip and often during the stay. This was his first activity with BCJ staff and peers; it was a very successful engagement for R. R became reliable and engaged; he developed a powerful voice and gained influence as an ambassador for the work.

R went on to develop a section of the BCJ webinar called 'On My Mind' where young people spoke about the impact of COVID on their mental health. He was also part of the group who organised activity for Black History month and who created youth led socio-educative materials about white privilege.

Observations

Attending the residential trip was not easy for R but was a huge personal achievement and a significant milestone. Staff have described this time together as "transformative" for him; both

he and they observed a shift in attitude. The residential was a key opportunity to have conversations about effective ways of managing anxiety. Whilst camping R was observed to employ self-regulation by periodically removing himself from the group and going for a walk, or sitting next to the camp fire. It was on the residential that R began to make friends – and these are friends with whom he connects and seeks out still.

BCJ staff are keenly aware of R's many 'ups and downs' during everyday life. What they say is striking, however, is his resolute commitment to BCJ and passion for its purpose. Further, R is noticed to be increasingly reflective about himself and where he has "gone wrong". Often this seems to be motivated by a fear of being "kicked out"; he has often checked in with staff to see whether there is an enduring connection. Staff are reflective that being a part of BCJ has been a positive force for R; his involvement seems to motivate him to keep trying, and supports him with an awareness of people who have hope for his future.

Learning and Reflections

When working with R we are mindful that it is very important to manage his expectations; he can become easily distressed and combative if he feels that he has been overlooked or that he is missing out on an opportunity. Frequent, transparent and clear communication is vital therefore.

Of key consideration is that fact that R was profoundly impacted by witnessing the murder of his friend. We do not currently collect or analyse any data regarding the number of young people that work with us whose lives have been impacted by serious youth violence, but it may emerge as a key theme.

R has responded well to responsibility which has developed a sense of purpose and pride in him. BCJ is developing R as a leader because, with support, he can effectively empower his peers and enable their involvement with our work. He is enthusiastic and heartfelt about our purpose. Developing this role for R seems to have alleviated his anxiety about not always being a participant. It has also been a positive way of supporting him beyond the systemic 'cliff edge', now that he is 25 years old.

Developments

In early 2021 R was arrested and given a custodial sentence. He was released in June 2021. On his second day of release he contacted his project worker from BCJ. He was very keen to relay the fact that whilst incarcerated he was frequently asking for help to make contact with her; in turn she was able to share information about her attempts to reach him. It felt urgent for R to know that he could be a part of our work going forwards. As a result, R is supporting a high profile Barnardo's fundraising event in July 2021 at which he will be a key speaker.

Upon release R found that his accommodation had been looted and vandalised. He has focused on cleaning this up and finding employment. R is currently in full time work. BCJ will be applying for an in-house grant to support R to purchase essential items, such as kitchen equipment and clothing.

Whilst in prison R turned 25. The Local Authority agreed to keep his case open until his release. BCJ and Brent Local Authority are now working together to manage a 'soft' closure, one which transitions into future opportunities for R to contribute positively to systemic change for care experienced young people. BCJ has strategic plans to test the creation of post 25 peer support networks in Brent and will be inviting R to shape this work. The team will also be encouraging R to apply for one of the currently live 'as and when' Assistant Project Worker

roles. Below is the quote from R reflecting his views of his involvement with Brent Care Journeys Programme:

"Whilst being a Brent care leaver I recently came across a service that was hosted by A [BCJ's Project worker] and Barnardo's. Initially I was sceptical to being part of the group due to past experiences. Since being part of the group I have overcome a lot of barriers and met a lot of people who fed me knowledge and life examples to be able to deliver this speech to you today. The reason why I joined the Movement properly and stayed committed was due to the energy and spirit of the group and as a team not giving up and pushing me to the limit to be able to achieve. Brent Care Journeys has played a huge factor in my life - especially A as she was very down to earth and truthful about what is holding me back".