



BREAKING THROUGH

MOVING ON FROM CHILD
SEXUAL EXPLOITATION

OUR STORIES IN FULL

Acknowledgements

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Breaking Through: Moving on from Child Sexual Exploitation

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Introduction

Despite widespread concerns about child sexual exploitation (CSE) in the UK, the voices of those who have experienced this often get lost or overlooked in debates about how to respond. In recent years, more attention has been given to how abuse happens, but we have heard little about how young people move on from CSE and what can best support this process.

Breaking Through is a set of resources co-produced by young people with experience of CSE, working with a researcher, an artist and a CSE support worker, using real stories of moving on from CSE. Based on the life stories of Daniel, Jade, Liberty, Natalie, Phoenix and Sharon, the resources capture experiences going as far back as the 1980s to as recent as 2015. The project was facilitated by Basis Yorkshire and the University of York. This booklet contains each life story in full, with some names changed and chosen by participants. You can watch our animation and find a shorter life stories booklet for young people at: www.basisyorkshire.org.uk.

As well as providing unique insights into the realities of CSE, the stories show how young people's individual experiences are shaped over time by relationships with parents and carers, abusive adults, and interventions from professionals, but also by wider factors such as welfare systems, criminal justice responses, education and access to money. The collection highlights how CSE happens to young people from a wide range of backgrounds including both boys and girls, and also how some young people are especially vulnerable. Experiences in care, run-ins with the police, trouble at school and drug/alcohol use all feature, mirroring wider research in this area. Each person recounts being seen as 'troublesome' in some way often blamed for their situation – underlining that if responses to CSE are to be effective, support must work for those who might be considered 'difficult' as well as those seen as more 'deserving' or 'easier' to work with.

All of the stories show how important it is for professionals to build trust with young people, take the time to listen and keep them informed about what is going on, making sure they know professionals are on their side. To support a process of 'breaking through', agencies need knowledge and skills but also appropriate resources and time, so the experiences of professional involvement included in this booklet should be read as framed by a wider context of changing developments in how the state supports children and young people.

Given the content, certain sections may be challenging to read, particularly for those who may have suffered similar experiences. However, we hope the **Breaking Through** resources will help young people, parents, practitioners and policy makers understand more about CSE and respond to it in ways that match the realities as told by those who know it best.

Dr Kate Brown
University of York

Phoenix's Story (Age 23): Nobody's going to defeat me

When I was about 18 months old, I witnessed a domestic violence incident between my mum and my biological dad and then my mum left him. When I was four I was sexually abused. I've got no memories of the sexual abuse and nobody was ever prosecuted for it. About a month later it was picked up and I was referred to be examined. That's when it all came out but by that time there was no evidence.

When I was seven the man that I thought was my dad left. My mum was poorly and ended up with Bipolar. When I was 10 we went into foster care with Mum's friend. They'd been friends for 18 years so my mum trusted her with her life, but she was emotionally and physically abusive towards us all. She said to me 'That's all your worth'. When I was 12 I refused to go back and then we all slowly moved back home. Then I found out that my dad wasn't my real dad. When I was 13, he was sentenced to 12 years in prison for murder and my best friend died. Then my dad committed suicide in prison when I was 14.

The exploitation started the day of my dad's funeral. Me and my sister had an argument that morning and she'd said 'He's not your real dad anyway'. I refused to go the funeral and ended up with what I thought was a friend. She knew older lads who would say 'Well, your dad clearly didn't love you for him to kill himself. I'll always be there to protect you and I'll always keep you safe'. It just stemmed from there and I believed them for a long time.

A lot of perpetrators used my dad. They can see how vulnerable you are - you don't need it tattooing on your head. You feel like you're the only one - I think there probably were loads of other girls but they isolated me. Once you go through it you just get used to it. They don't love you and they won't protect you or keep you safe.



One time I ended up being put in hospital for a week with bruising round my neck, up my back, in between my things, my arms. I'd been biting my tongue because of the drugs that I'd been on, which was swelling up and obstructing my throat. I had to be fully examined and the police said I'd inflicted my own injuries and was mentally unwell after my dad had committed suicide. But his hand print was round my throat from where he'd strangled me and thrown me against a wall. He was in his twenties, I was 15 and only six stone because of the drugs.

He was texting and he came to the hospital just after the police had left. He brought me 200 cigs and told me not to say anything.

After leaving hospital I was picked up in town by two blokes, taken up Bradford and that's where I lived for the next three months. I was exploited by a family over there. They'd dyed and cut my hair so that nobody would recognise me, and they changed my name. They took away my entire identity and were total bastards. You go three months of being abused every single day, and not just by one man. They put me in hospital and then laughed about it. A lot of people think it's just Muslim men but there was a woman, white and black men involved with me.

The Homicide and Major Enquiry team that were dealing with it, they arrested two people. One of them got a harbouring caution but they didn't go and get any evidence [...] Yes, that family were the ones that I really wanted punishing and I wanted to prove to them that they didn't have a hold on me and I'll never give up.

When I came back to Leeds I was put in a private children's home, which pretty much saved my life. I was still being exploited when I was there. There was me and another girl that lived there. There were only three bed spaces at that home and so it didn't feel like a children's home. They actually listened to you. I was in a car accident with the girl and a taxi driver. He died and she almost died. I'd broken two bones on the same side of my body. Then, I was diagnosed with PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder), so I went through all sorts of therapy. I moved out of the children's home when I was 17.

Four months after I moved out of there I was sexually assaulted by a bloke in the early hours of New Year's Day. There was a girl I'd grown up with all my life - it was her baby's dad and he was 47. She left me in the living room with him for it to happen and she robbed me. It's pretty bad at 17 I knew what to do with my clothes after the sexual attack. I was not waiting to get showered. The police sent two male coppers round and I said, 'You're sitting outside in the snow until someone gets here that's female.' They were amazing and actually listened to me.

It was nearly two years before it got to court and he was found not guilty. The police collected me and took me to court every day for over a week. They kept in contact for two years and did everything they could. When he was found not guilty the investigating officer brought round my evidence. If it hadn't been for them I'd never have given evidence about the CSE.

Moving on from CSE

If I didn't move on and do something positive with my life, and gone down the path everybody assumed I'd go down, then I'd be letting them win. I went to college and studied childcare and learned a lot there. I went on to get a job working with sex offenders and rapists. If I did my job properly and they've got support to deal with their issues, they're not going to reoffend. I don't judge people just because of what I've been through.

I like who I am now and I wouldn't change anything. Now I work in a support service for abused women and children, and I wouldn't be able to do my job if I hadn't been through the stuff I've been through. Good support is so big to anybody. I know I can change things.

I hated my mum for a long time. I blamed her for my dad dying. Then I moved back in with her just after Jacob was found not guilty, because my ex was stalking me and making me think it was Jacob. I get on better with my mum but we're more like friends than mother and daughter, which isn't really the healthiest sometimes but it's better than being at each other's throats.

I didn't know that I were being exploited until six months ago - I actually told the police that I was a prostitute. The police had blamed it on me for so long - that I put myself in those positions and I was a bad kid. But what 15-year-old girl calls herself a prostitute? The police did nothing. They knew about the CSE because my mum was telling them.

They said, 'she's going willingly, we can't do anything about it'. If I could number the men all over the years, it'd be in the hundreds. It wasn't groups, it was normally one or two. They isolated me a lot of the time.

Then this year the police turned up at my door while I was at work. It's eight years ago and I didn't understand that it was CSE until the police sat me down. I was angry at first. I said, 'Why now? Why not back then?' I complained to West Yorkshire Police, social services, the NHS because I wanted my anger to go into something. Then, I was diagnosed with complex PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) so I had to go back in therapy.

I found it hard because I couldn't identify who was exploiting me and who wasn't. There was a guy that I was seeing - was he exploiting me or was it just one of those relationships? I found it really hard to identify whether he was a perpetrator or not because he was the only one that didn't degrade me, physically hit me, make me feel low or use my dad.

Words of wisdom

Don't just put it down to them being a bad kid. Look for the signs and listen to the parents. Schools need to keep their eyes open - in my case they blatantly knew.

You know the signs of sexual abuse. As a teenager they're probably being exploited if they're coming home with more gifts or money, or they're staying out later than normal. If they're a bit more timid, have bruising, the way they talk or look has changed, or if they're secretive over the phone. When they disclose stuff, act on it. Listen to the girls and boys if they're speaking about it.

I wouldn't change any of it though. It sounds horrible but not even my dad dying or anything like that. Because it's made me who I am. I was supposed to start uni this year but I had to defer because of the investigation and the PTSD... I want to do criminal psychology and then I want my own firm. I really want to do the pre-sentence reports and risk assessments for offenders, so all the probation stuff.

Nobody's going to defeat me - they've done it all my life. I don't like victim and I don't like survivor. A victim says that you're still part of that process, you're damaged. Survivor means that you've got through it. The author Shy Keenan, calls herself a phoenix... I like that.

Liberty's Story (Age 17): I know I can do it

Growing up I lived with my mum, my brothers and my dad. When I was four or five my grandad died and my dad died when I was 11. We had a social worker when I was a child which stopped my dad being violent towards my mum. We found out last year my dad committed suicide. Then I found out my dad was my step-dad. My real dad is a child molester and I don't have anything to do with him. It's in the family - my grandad raped my auntie and tried to rape my mum. It makes me feel disgusting just to say the word.

I worked with social services and CAMHS (Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services) recently because of my anger and behaviour problems after my dad died. I was violent towards my mum, and sometimes my brothers. I used to kick and punch my auntie, pull her hair and use strong words.

Around the age of 12 to 13 I started meeting these older males. Then I met other people including my daughter's dad. I thought it was okay - someone new to talk to. Before I started smoking they started buying me crisps and drinks and stuff like that which felt nice, but obviously it's not nice because you can't trust them.



I thought my baby's dad was really nice, but he's not a nice person. We had sex - he took me to hotels and bought me cigarettes. We were in a proper relationship until I was 15 and he was 34, and then he got arrested. I think found out I was pregnant about two days before that. We should have used condoms but I got rashes - I found out I was allergic to latex after I fell pregnant.

My mum had phoned the police saying I was missing. He took me to a hotel and when he dropped me back off there was a police car outside my house. Then he got arrested when they found out how old I actually was. He had drugs in his car as well, which I told them about. I cried. I had to make a statement. He said some very nasty stuff about me. So obviously now I realised that he's not who I thought he was. I've only seen him once since then. He was supposed to have contact with our daughter every fortnight but he only showed up three times.

When I was 15 and pregnant I met my current boyfriend. He used to live next door to my auntie. I had a difficult time giving birth. I didn't really know him but when my baby was in intensive care I took him to the hospital to see her. I didn't want my baby not having a father figure around - I got told off for that. Then we slowly got into a relationship. I took my baby to his house once - he was living with his friend who seemed nice as well. He picked her up, changed her and kissed her - stuff like that.

When I came home with my baby, I had C-section pains and couldn't walk all the way to my house. There was this person I knew who worked in the shop and I asked him if he could give me a lift home. He had a car seat for my baby and I was sat in front. My mum found out that I put my baby at risk by putting her in someone's car who I barely knew. She didn't know I was seeing all these people at this time. She told the social workers, who were very worried. My baby got taken off me for putting her at risk - that's a big thing for me to admit. So, obviously we've had a rough year. It's not been easy since she got taken away.

When I was 16 I was at the hardware shop down the road. I'm friends with the guy who owns it and the other work colleagues there, but it was just us two. He started kissing me and forcing himself on me. He's got charged for rape and three counts of assault because he punched me - it was more like playing but it really bloody hurt. We've got a strong case against him but I've got to wait until July for court.

At first I didn't like the police but I've got to know them. I talk to the local police officer that goes round the estates and stuff, even though they're really, really scary.

They've given me general advice and they were really supportive with the rape, they give me advice on how to deal with it. My social worker, therapeutic social worker and support worker have been really helpful. Me and my mum don't really have a good relationship but since I've worked with the social workers we have come closer together. My social worker's alright but my daughter's social workers don't tell me stuff. They tell other people stuff - I find out at the last minute or after something happens, so I feel quite left out. My solicitor is a pain in my butt as well. She doesn't talk to me about all the court stuff she sends me.

The therapeutic social worker really helped. Instead of just getting into therapeutic sessions straightaway we'd play games to calm ourselves down, do some colouring and then we go into the session. If I'm proper stressed and down we've got this technique. You sit down and say five things you can see, hear, touch and smell. Or you can close your eyes and make an imaginary place so if you've got a problem you can go into that. Mine's a palace - a big palace. It's all purple apart from the windows - those are gold. Instead of taking it out on everyone, I have a place in my head to go and calm down. I also worked with Basis who used different videos and scenarios to help understand what's going on. At first I didn't realise that I was being groomed and I hated people using that word around me. From the support I have had, I can now see that I was tricked into relationships and made to do things that I didn't really want to do.



Moving on from CSE

I used to see different men at the same time. There's this one person I see, I shouldn't see him but I do. The police know and they want me to give them his number or address but I'm not ready for that. I've seen less of him since I got my own money. I got my bursary money in for college and ever since we've been arguing a lot. I said to him, 'You're the one that's using me, you're using me for sex. You're buying me stuff just so I won't tell the police', which is very rare

for me to do as I am scared of him. I know that he buys me these things so that it doesn't look like he is doing anything wrong, but he is.

Recently he's been getting violent but he never used to. Today I said I was worried about my health and he said 'good', if I die. He pushed me onto the bed and lay proper heavily on me. I was crying and I couldn't breathe - he said I was lying about it.

The police came and saw me in college the other day. After they'd left I told the tutor I'm scared of telling them because he's threatened to come after me, my mum and my baby. I'm just scared. I know I can do it, I know that I can cope without him. In a way I'm scared to do it but in another way I'm not scared, it's just I need time to think of what I really, really want to do. So, it's just all too much, but at least I'm not seeing him every day like I used to. I want to help the police but I want to help him as well even though he doesn't really deserve to be helped.

Now I'm on a year course studying Health and Social Care, I go on placement soon. I'm good at signing to deaf children and I'm into dancing, so maybe I could teach disabled children or people how to sing or dance. Hopefully I'll get custody of my daughter, have her back in our own place. I'm going to get the right guy. Someone my age who treats me right and who I can trust. Hopefully I'll also get a better relationship with my family.

Words of wisdom

If you meet someone and they seemed a bit dodgy, then tell someone close about it - school, teachers, close friends or the police if you're really worried. Don't believe what people say because it can just be full of lies. If they're buying you stuff every day and said they love you, think about it and think to yourself, what am I doing? Am I doing the right thing? Think about the dangers before it's too late.

Daniel's Story (Age 18): I Can Have a Healthy Relationship

I had a normal upbringing in a middle-class family. Around the age of 12 I started to realise that I might be gay or bi and when I was 13 I came out to everyone as gay. Because my town was quite conservative there weren't many out gay people that I knew or could talk to.

I downloaded a couple of gay chat apps onto my iPod. This led to older guys messaging me and spiralled down into sexual talk, meeting up, and pictures with several people over a few months. This was a few months after I turned 13, and very quickly it advanced to, 'Do you want to try anything? Shall we meet up and you can give stuff a go?'

After I met the first guy it became normal that someone my age was doing this with older men. My mind was so warped by what these people were saying and I didn't know what was healthy. I didn't think about safe sex because they said it was fine, so I was easily manipulated by anyone. They never said to me, 'don't tell anybody about it' - I didn't want people to know that I was sexually active anyway.

At first I never felt out of control of the situations because I felt like I was older. I was getting in people's houses before I met them properly and having unprotected sex and all that. It was no big deal because nothing bad had happened - it was just fun and games, really.

At the time it was nothing abnormal but looking back it was all manipulation and pressuring. I was raped by a guy who had lied about his age and sent me some pictures who weren't him. Even then, because he wasn't violent I still didn't click on that it was something really wrong. I knew I didn't like it but rape didn't pop into my head. People my age would have house parties but my parents wouldn't let me drink or stay out past a certain time. In my head I was like, 'I'm having sex so why can't I drink?' I would easily snap and get angry with them. I'd start smashing things and getting really worked up and panicky. I started lying to them and ignoring their calls. My parents noticed I was getting angrier. I thought I didn't need support but I definitely did.

Then this 21-year old didn't want to know me anymore. I got very upset and disclosed to my auntie that I'd been talking to this guy. She disclosed to

my mum who rang school and they rang the police. School also rang BLAST because they wanted to draft one of their workers in to try and help me. It was like a huge bang - suddenly it's all changed. I was taken out of the classroom into the head teacher's office and there were two police officers, two social workers and some other people.

The police were straight over to ask me for my phone. There was one holding my arms behind my back while they were taking the phone out. I felt like I was being punished. In my head I was like why are you taking my stuff and making my life hell? I wasn't allowed a phone or access to the internet. Then a couple of weeks after they took my phone and my laptop, they came back for my iPod which was the only thing I had left.

I was really worked up and hysterical and no-one was saying to me that I was a victim. The police were interviewing me and it was just 'What's happened? What are their names?' I couldn't get to my friends and it felt like I was being thrown in at the deep end. I was off school for about a week before a meeting was set up with a worker from BLAST. For a while I didn't see myself - and a lot of people didn't see me - as a victim. So when my main support worker was saying I was a victim I didn't see it.



I managed to get talking to more guys because I was just more frustrated. I was wanting to get back into it to escape the situation I was in. I met another seven or eight people, and one of them took me down to London to his house. The police twigged straight away but we managed to get through six counties without anyone stopping me. The police turned up at his house after 30 minutes, arrested him, put me

in a police station for about nine hours. My parents picked me up at two in the morning and I was taken to a police station at eight in the morning in Yorkshire to do the interview.

That was the second time I was raped - he was violent with it. Until then I'd not twigged that these people were the bad guys and I was a victim. When he was arrested he disclosed that he was HIV positive and I had to wait three months to find out if I'd been infected. I got a lot of support from my main support worker about it, but the police just said 'He's got HIV so you need to get yourself checked out'.

The first time I met my social worker she came in guns blazing and was like, 'Why are you texting this much? My son doesn't text this much. You shouldn't be talking to these people that much'. I completely shut off from her and the relationship was ruined. I felt everyone was saying 'stop doing this, stop doing this'. I feel like if I was a girl I would've been sympathised with more. Instead it was more like, 'You're doing this yourself'.

I was so pissed off. I was quite shut down with my BLAST worker at first. But straightaway he was like, 'I'm not here to tell you off. I'm here to help you'. He was the first person who'd asked how I was. It was the first time I felt like I wasn't being persecuted.

We weren't happy with how the first police team were handling the case. They said 'you need to give evidence, you need to tell us everything' and didn't really care if I got upset. After the second rape the head of the police station said I was a waste of resources, and if I did it again they'd lock me up in an institution. We complained massively.

A new team came in with rape and CSE case experience, and they knew what they were doing. They knew how to handle me and could tell whether to do an interview or just leave me, which massively helped. We were always kept really up to date on what was happening with court cases and arrests. They went back through my laptop and phones and made dozens more arrests. I definitely felt I could open up with the second team because they wanted to help. If they had been involved first I wouldn't have held back information for so long.

Until I realised I was the victim and that it was wrong, there were massive fall-outs at home. After we got the new team in, it was so much more relaxed because we knew we were in good hands and that I wasn't going to put myself at risk anymore. So from then on

we were happier again and we were more of a family rather than dysfunctional and fighting all the time.

Moving on from CSE

When the guy disclosed he was HIV positive it was a massive bombshell and I was really scared. I woke up and realised these people don't care. Once I realised it was wrong, I got a backbone. If someone approached me I'd say, 'I don't want to get involved, leave me alone' whereas before it would've just gone with it. I definitely got stronger. This guy I'd chatted with raped another boy a couple of months after he tried it on with me. That made me feel like the more I open up, the less likely it is that someone else has to. So even though I wasn't getting on with the police, I wanted to give them information.

In court I was cross-examined by the defence barristers through a video link. It was the most horrific thing because after months of people telling you you're the victim, you're being told by some barrister that you're a liar. Most people pleaded guilty or were found guilty. The one who abducted me and took me to London only got a suspended sentence.

I could have applied to the A-levels exam board at sixth form for an extra five per cent but I didn't want to be the special case. So I pushed myself and got really into my studies - it was almost like a distraction. I enjoyed it, finished it and now I'm on a year out, working somewhere with a good set of friends, and I've got a place at university next year studying Chemistry.

I'm easily pressurised in social situations so if someone wants me to have a cigarette I'll do it to avoid a confrontation. But I feel like I'm a stronger person around relationships. If someone wanted me to do something that I didn't want to do, I now have the confidence to say.

I'm still not confident body-wise, and I'm always going to have that mindset that I'm not good enough for someone. I had a psychiatrist who taught me cognitive behavioural therapy. I had hypochondria and really bad anxiety, and I couldn't sleep. I was offered medication but always questioned whether I should be on it. CAMHS massively helped - taught me to calm down through mindfulness.

I definitely want to settle down in the future. I don't think I'm affected by it enough that I wouldn't want to get close to someone. I think I can have a healthy relationship and I want that in the future at some point.

Words of wisdom

Police and teachers shouldn't treat boys differently to girls because they've been through the exact same thing, been told the same things, and been offered the same things. Just because a boy of 13 is being abused it doesn't mean he can stand up to it and stop it himself - he's still a 13-year old just like a girl.

Practitioners should always read the young person's body language and attitude - pushing someone who's already got a wall up is just going to push them further back in, and you're not going to get anything from them. My support worker built a relationship with me and until that was established we didn't delve into the heavy stuff. Build up a relationship and don't be stone cold.

Don't talk to people you don't know on the internet. If someone you don't know is adding you on Face-

Sharon's Story (Age 43): Going to that court a strong woman

My mum had been in a mental institution because of the car accident and the death of my dad. She'd met another man, and ended up having four more children with him. It was like me and my brother were the outsiders. I was hit numerous times. I had fingers broken. We had no childhood, just beatings and did without food for punishments. I never told anybody because we were so scared of him.



I desperately wanted to go to school just to escape. When you're going to school, you're not concentrating, you've got bruises and marks that you're having to suffer with the pain, trying not to do PE to cover up so nobody sees them.

book, don't give them the conversation they're seeking. If you need someone to talk to, go to a service like ChildLine instead of going on an app that's meant for adults. Never go on the internet thinking you'll find something there because you'll put yourself at risk. You just need to take the time to see what everyone else is seeing.

As a gay person, usually at 13, 14 there are only going to be one or two people out in the year. You feel like there's never going to be anyone, but as soon as I hit 17 it was springing up everywhere. It sounds a cliché but I was the only gay in the village - and suddenly there were ten of us. It's so much more rewarding having these friendships than some 30-year old man from the internet because you actually connect on a deep level.

The sexual abuse first started with his dad, my stepdad's dad, so he was like my grandad. I couldn't tell anybody still because my stepdad would have said, 'you're lying. That's my dad. Who do you think you are?' I was running away. I hated it. I wanted to go in care. I wanted to know what life was. I wanted to have a proper mum and dad, someone that loved us and cared. I'd never heard my mum say, 'I love you,' put her arms round us, tuck us in bed.

Because I didn't speak they just thought I was a naughty child rebelling, and it wasn't. I was taken to the hospital because I was so thin and I remember the doctor saying to me, 'If you don't eat we're going to force feed you,' and I thought, 'I do bloody eat. It's just that I don't get chance to have food'.

I came from a nice clean home, even in my records it always said, 'Parents weren't in debt, clean home'. They'd bought their house and it was just everything else. You could have a castle and still people can be monsters with you.

Eventually I got taken into care. The foster carers were nice, there was food. I fainted quite a few times in foster care when they were telling me off, probably because of the fear, thinking what they were going to do to me. I was fainting all the time. I always remember that.

It was a lot just to move round constantly like a bloody unwanted dog, home to home to home. I always said, 'If somebody said to me a million pounds or go back to your childhood and be with loving parents, which would you pick?' and I said, 'I'd go back to my childhood and be with loving parents and see what that life is like'.

I just couldn't manage family environments anymore. It was too hard. I wasn't used to living like that. I stayed with the foster parents and took a big overdose, 100 and odd paracetamols. I'd had enough. I just felt like there was no life. What was going to happen to me? I felt like I had nobody to talk to because, like I said, the trust had gone with everybody. Then, social services came in and said I couldn't stay. I had to go in the children's home because there were no more foster parents that'd take me in.

This big, horrible boss.... you used to have to go into his office. You're there in your school uniform, 13, 14. He used to lock the door and abuse you – search you for cigarettes. Then he'd throw your school bag at you and tell you to get dressed. We'd just all look at each other going in and out, and we knew what was happening. Nobody said anything. That went on every day.

Then, on a night time, the night staff would get you out of bed. Two, three o'clock on a morning, hand over your mouth, dragged into the shower rooms, by your hair. They'd make you strip out of your pyjamas, nightie, whatever you had on, and you had to lay on that cold floor while they abused you.

My school was ruined and I blame all of these people for that. There was just nowhere safe, and then that's when I wished... I hated the doctors for saving me. I'd be this hard-faced girl but deep down inside I was a mess.

We used to have this big area with snooker, pool, things like that, kids would kick off. They'd throw chairs at the staff. The staff would punch us, kick us. Somebody had had either their leg or their arm broken by a member of staff. That's why they had angry teenagers. Kids would be fighting each other - just anger - or they'd be running away. We never told the police. I was scared I'd be taken back to my family.

I kept running away and was eventually placed in foster care. I just started getting on a lot better and going to school. I enjoyed going to school for the

first time. I was getting a good night's sleep and knew nobody was dragging me out of bed. There were no men there, which was a good thing for me. It was just a mum and her daughter. Then I had to move again to some more foster parents.

I had to change school, which was difficult. My brother had been at the same school as me and even though I didn't live at home I still could see him and that was nice for me. Then going to a new school meant I'd lost everything I had including contact with my brother. That's where they fail you. They're moving you round from home to home. They expect you to do well at school, then they're taking you out of school, putting you in a new school, taking you out.

Moving on from CSE

I think once I'd left the children's home, I had it in my mind that that's done. It's gone, I never have to go back in that place. Nothing's going to happen to me ever again.

I always wanted to look after people. I've always had that caring in me and I used to work in nursing homes. I just loved the relationships that I had with the elderly, talking to them about when they were younger, doing their nails, their hair... just having time for them.

I had to give it up because my first boyfriend kept hitting me. He was very violent with me, but you learn to live with it and you think that's all you're worth. One day, I snapped and left him.

A while after I met a new man, we got married and had three wonderful kids. We have this lovely house. He's a good father and he does everything for me.

April last year it all came out. My husband never knew about any of my past. You build this brick wall and I've let it down so many times and had to rebuild it back up because that's your protection. I've just got to learn to let that brick wall down. I had a heart attack in 2010. They had to bring me back to life and I wanted to be brought back to life this time. I had a lot to live for, my husband and my children.

I put everything into it to be the best mum I can be. It's shown at school when we go to parents evening. They're very good children. I learned to be a mum and I tell my children all the time, 'Love you, love you.' Even when they go to bed, they're texting me, 'Love you, mum. Night'. I read them stories and play - everything that I didn't get.

Some of the staff have already been prosecuted, but the boss is still on bail. Why isn't he doing his time, locked up, waiting for our court dates? I hate that part. He's in his sixties now. I keep thinking, what if he kills himself or dies? Then I won't get my day in court to stand up and look at him in his eyes, a strong woman, and let him know that I'm not scared of him anymore, and tell everybody what he did.

My future is to see my children grow up, nothing bad to ever happen to them and know that I've done my best that way. I want my children to do well at school because I didn't get that chance. To have the best career, to know that we're always here for them, and just be happy.



I have my ups and downs. My next step, is going to that court a strong woman. I'm going to do my counselling, get strong, stand up there and I'm not

Natalie's Story (Age 20): It gets better

I was sexually abused by my dad until the age of 13 and when it came out they didn't believe me, didn't offer me a medical, interview or anything. They took me back home and I lived there for eight months more. I was overdosing a lot and the doctors refused to discharge me back home from hospital - I wasn't safe.

My dad stayed in the family and I was chucked out. I went into care when I was 13 and was moved quite a lot. There were loads of placements - about ten or fifteen in the North and South of England, even as far as Scotland. I kept putting myself at risk and running away.

even going to cry and give him the satisfaction. I want to walk away from there with justice done and not to be failed for the very, very last time.

Words of wisdom

Look for the signs. Children that are being abused are withdrawn. I think they need to look for warning signs. They want to be alone. They're looking more tired. They're not doing their work so well.

You don't know if their abuser has told them, 'You tell anybody and we'll kill your family', I think having an open discussion, not forcing it or pushing it on a child, just gradually building their trust. A lot of people that have been abused lose their trust in everybody.

I wish somebody, a teacher or anybody, would have pulled me to the side, on my own, and said, 'Is everything okay?' Not to push them too much. 'I'm here if you want to talk, if there's anything'. Because push it too much they're going to go, 'Oh no, they know,' and it will scare them.

You only get one life and no matter who's hurt you as a child, things can get better - you can have a good life and move on. A lot of us think we're not good people - we're bad and it happened to us because we're naughty. It's important not to think like that. Things will get better. You've just got to be strong and find that inner you. Just how I've done it, and I'm still smiling, look.

When I was around the age of 14 some guy pulled up in a car and started asking me stuff. At first I didn't want to, but then he offered to buy me things and I didn't have any money as I was in care. I was underage for smoking, and they could get me cigs. I wasn't expecting much more and I didn't really understand it. But then got it more serious with drugs and stuff - he made me take coke and I didn't want to take it, and sleep with guys. They followed me around and watched what I was doing.

Before I got involved there was this time I was with a girl from my care home, and these two guys asked us to go to a hotel. I was unsure but she wanted to go. They gave us weed, drinks and put stuff in front of our noses, telling us to snort it. When the drugs started

kicking in a load more guys just came into the room - I didn't know whether I was imagining it or whether it was actually happening. I freaked out and I tried to make myself sick in the toilet to get it out of my system so I could get out. Three o'clock in the morning I ran out the hotel with nothing but my knickers on. I'd had to leave my clothes and everything there and run - that's the only way I could leave. I called the police - they didn't believe me - they said, 'we're not your taxi home'. About ten minutes later this car pulled up. This guy asked me to get in and offered me cigs and a lift. I wanted to sit in the car and have a cig but he started speeding off so I opened the door and then ran.

I was trying to tell people what was going on but no one was listening. I got more involved and was just sleeping with people, taking drugs, drink and getting cigs. I'd take anything they gave me - you didn't even know what it was because they shoved it up your nose. I was running away a lot. The police used to pick me up when I was walking back. They used to be horrendous - calling me a bitch for running away and wasting their time. I found it bizarre they were like that.

One day, I was minding my own business and the care home manager goes, 'Right, go and pack a bag. You're going away for a few days.' He said it was because of how I'd been, and that it would give me some respite. I went up to Scotland and it was literally a bungalow in the middle of nowhere. I wasn't allowed a telly - it was more like discipline. I asked for the radio on in the car on the way there but wasn't allowed. They gave me a Rubik's cube and that was it. I wasn't allowed cigs so I was outside picking all the doggers. Then I tried running away and I ended up... I don't know where.

Next they found a place in a children's home. I tried to delay them by getting arrested, but it didn't work. I told them I didn't want to be there. As we were going I threw something at the van. The Team Manager just carried on driving so I turned round and smashed a glass door with my hand. I got rushed to hospital to have an operation. They knew I'd run away and wouldn't look after my hand so I was put in secure accommodation.

I hated it in secure at first. They said it was only going to be two months. Originally, social care said they didn't want a psychological assessment, but when we were back in court going for another order they said they did. They could have done that in the first two months. They were messing me about and trying to keep me there as long as possible.

Moving on from CSE

The first year in supported housing for care leavers was hectic. Running away, overdosing, self-harming - everything I could do, I did. I didn't know what was going on and everything got on top of me. I didn't talk to anyone about the secure children's home and got back involved with the guys quite seriously.

Then one day they said 'Once you get to a certain age we're not interested anymore.' I didn't understand. He said 'you're too old, you don't need us no more.' They walked away to look for other people. I said 'So you've put me through all this and then you're just going to walk away like nothing's happened?' He said yes.

When the supported housing staff said 'We're not going to give up on you,' I didn't believe them. Then they started showing they weren't going to give up on me, regardless of whatever I threw at them. I am where I am today because of them. They always made the effort to talk to me, take me out and support me. At that time in my life they were round nearly every day.

Then, when it got nearer to my 18th a light bulb clicked. Social care would not be there - you have to grow up and get on with your life. I met my ex just before I turned 18 and became pregnant. It all happened really fast and then I thought 'I'm pregnant. I can't do what I used to do'. I live in my own house now, looking after my son.

I got a care leavers award for the journey I've been through and will get to present it to someone else next year. I just passed my driving test and got my car. I go to college and I'm doing my GCSEs again, then I want to study health and social care and be a children's social worker.

Words of wisdom

It gets better. Talking about your feelings can make you feel better. Even if you feel good or not good about yourself, you don't feel as pressured with all your emotions.

I think a lot of people who go through CSE can find it difficult to tell people. I used to give hints and see how people reacted. If they reacted badly, I didn't speak. If they reacted all right, I used to give a bit of information, but not all of it. It's difficult because when you're with the men they're telling you not to tell - you feel like you've got to do what they say. Then, when you're back wherever you're living, you feel like you want to tell people.

Ask for more information, but don't just automatically presume. Don't just come out bluntly and say, 'Can you tell me more about that please?' When someone's going through it, they're feeling alone as it is. That might make them want to go to these guys, so if you're pushing for information it's just going to push the young person towards them.

Staff could do something with the young person. If you're in a care home or if there's other young people

Jade's Story (Age 16): I'm growing stronger

I live with my mum and dad and loads of brothers and sisters. The oldest one's 19, then the youngest one's 1. My mum's always given us leeway. She believes protecting your kids too much can sometimes make them worse.

My mum took my sister's friend Jack in because he was doing drugs and living in a scruffy house. He became like family. We like got really close, always watching films together and stuff like that. I started seeing him when my mum and dad went out, and Jack babysat for us. I slept with him the first night then. He was about 19, 20 and I was about 12, nearly 13.



I started a relationship with Jack and things were good. He was like buying me things, telling me he loved me and that he wanted to be with me. I was so young that at the time I thought 'oh it's a bit of male attention - He's buying me things, giving me money, letting me drink beer and giving me weed'. But then he was texting other girls that were my age as well. He was playing games - he'd hide my hair straighteners, hide my phone charger and disconnect me from the internet so I couldn't talk to

about, the attention gets split up and some people don't like that. If it's just going for a coffee, I don't know, once a week or something, it's making the young person think, 'oh, they're actually there for me'. Young people will be ready to tell in their own time, it's just a matter of when.

Workers need to be on your side, until you believe they're actually going to be there for you.

anyone or make my hair look nice. That started after a few months. We broke up and got back together. But it was all just for one thing.

It got worse and there were times when he said he was going to kill himself, if we weren't together. I didn't like people controlling me in school, and then I'd go home and get controlled by him. I like to have my own space but Jack he was there, watching everything I did - sending me text messages. I was also getting excluded from school because he was getting me to skive off and meet him.

At one point I became attracted to my dad's friend Mark. When I was 12 or 13 he started sending me photographs and rude videos of himself. Once I was at Mark's house when he started getting physical in front of me and making me feel really awkward. It's just disgusting, it makes me feel sick.

I had a big fall out with that family, and didn't want anything to do with them. Mark's wife got me on a contract for anti-social behaviour - making up lies about me so I wasn't allowed down the other end of the street and I had to be in at 7 o'clock on a night. But Mark was still sending me rude videos of himself. Then Mark took advantage of me. He got me drunk and stoned in my own house, followed me upstairs and raped me.

It all came out when I thought I was pregnant with Jack. I told school, school rang the police and they informed social services. Social services got Basis involved, and my support worker came to see me. It was supportive and I could speak to them. I told one of my best friends and I felt a bit of relief, but I didn't know she was talking to Jack behind my back. She's a disgrace and I won't ever speak to her again. She's in a relationship with him now.

When all this was going on I started self-harming, cutting my legs and pulling my hair out. I was just going crazy. School sent me to hospital because things got that bad. I was sat there crying and pulling my hair. School referred me to CAMHS and they said 'there's nothing wrong with her'. They said I'm completely fine, but I get involved in the wrong crowd, do the wrong things.

The police officer that dealt with Mark's case set things up to fail. She was never ringing us to let us know what had been going on, or what was happening next. The other police officer that dealt with Jack was brilliant - really supportive. She let us know what was going on. When I did my statement I was quite embarrassed and she was like, 'you can't tell me anything I haven't heard before'.

While they were investigating Mark they couldn't find anything. He didn't get done for it and he comes down my street every day, tormenting the life out of me. He'll smile and wave at me. Knowing that he's walking around, scot-free.

Jack's in prison now for it. He got seven and a half years, halved to three and a half for telling the truth. He can get out in a year and a half but he'll be under licence for the rest. I did used to miss him, but he stole my innocence.

I told my mum about Jack. She was like 'How did I not notice all this is going on? It makes her feel like she's gone wrong and it's her fault. I can't express to her how much it's not her fault. I thought my mum was going to have a breakdown.

When people are first calling Jack a paedophile I was like, 'leave him alone, he's not a paedophile'. I did consent to him but then again I wasn't old enough to consent. I've always said in court I was in a relationship with him. But obviously he had more advantages than me which is not fair. I'm a young age, and he's 20. He knew he could ruin my life. So when people say to me, 'Oh it's ruined his life' I don't have any sympathy.

I now understand what was happening because the police and my mum have shown me different signs of sexual exploitation. Why was he buying me stuff..? A phone? Beer? Weed? I had never touched drugs until I met him, but I did it to get in with the crowd.

Moving on from CSE

I'm growing stronger to it. I'm getting my head down at school now and doing my GCSEs. Now I can have a drink with my mum - a supervised drink. I've done my CV today because I want a weekend job to keep me busy. I'm doing an equestrian programme at the stables. I go riding for an hour and then do stable management.

I really want to be a PCSO and to work my way up to dealing with safeguarding. I want to work with kids like the kids at my school, and troubled kids like I have been in the past. Everyone's looked at me and thought 'you tearaway' and I just think you all never knew the full story. There's always reasons behind why somebody behaves like they do.

Words of wisdom

When they're grooming you, buying you stuff it's not because they want to buy you it, it's because they want to take advantage yet again. They want to control you and for you to do what they say.

Speak to somebody older about it. Parents, aunties, friends, a support worker, youth worker or teacher. A trusted person, and not somebody who would take advantage of the situation.

I'll have a good job, a nice family, a nice house. And then when they're all like, 'Oh my God how's Jade got that?' And I'll be like two fingers up to the lot of you. Because you all put me down when I was in a bad place, you knew what he was doing, and he knew.

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