

CCHILD EXPLOITATION & ABUSE HASN'T GONE AWAY

A collection of writing and artwork from young people and women who have worked with Basis Young People and the STAGE project.

*In connection with the
Basis Young People
conference
'Improving
Responses to Child
Exploitation'.*

Basis
young people

Introduction

This booklet contains writing and art work from young people and adult clients who have worked with the Basis Young People service.

The **skill** and **dedication** evidenced in these pieces is a testament to the **strength** and **creativity** of those we have had the privilege to work with over the past years and we are glad to be able to share their **incredible** work with you all.

The messages included within the work are **powerful** ones we hope to share far and wide. They were made with **helping others** in mind and to **raise awareness** of key issues the people we work with have experienced and continue to experience.

While we **encourage you to share this work** wherever you feel it may be helpful, please be aware that this booklet contains explicit details of experiences of exploitation and abuse that **may be triggering** or difficult to read for some. Please make sure that if you decide to share this booklet, you do so with proper support available and in place for those who may need it.

This work was collated as a follow up to our third biennial conference: **Improving Responses to Child Exploitation**, which was organised to mark Child Exploitation Awareness Day in 2021.

We hope, however, that the messages and work shared in this booklet will stand the test of time and prove insightful and useful resources for years to come.

With many thanks,
The Basis Young People's Team

'Think of how the young person you work with is feeling and use this to inform your approach...'

This young person's world has **fell apart**, and somebody they potentially **loved** and **trusted** has been taken away from them and they had **no control** over the matter. They are **broken**. We know that this was for the best, but they may still be in **denial**, this denial can last for quite some time after and so it is important to be **empathetic** and **listen** to them. A **judgemental, victim blaming attitude** will make the young person **shut away** from you immediately, let alone the fact that this is completely **unprofessional**. Try to **put yourself in their shoes**, and imagine how you would be feeling, or **imagine they are somebody close to you**, how would you want a professional to talk to one of **your loved ones?**

Written by A Lioness



Support Tips: From a Lioness

Things to say: “I believe you”; “I am going to help you”; “It is not your fault”; “I understand you may find it hard to trust after everything that has happened to you, but this is a safe place”.

These are all things I wish had been said to me to make me feel safe.



Do not say anything at all that is victim blaming, try to think everything over in your head before you say it, and think how you would feel in their situation if someone said that to you. **Examples of things said to me:** “But you did download that app?” “But you did choose to go out to meet him” and “You got in the car!”



Do not promise to keep things a secret, be honest if you need to pass on any information to management and make it clear what is going to happen next. **I was often left in the dark about what was happening, and I would hear practitioners discussing things under their breath about me whilst I was in the room, it was very unnerving.**

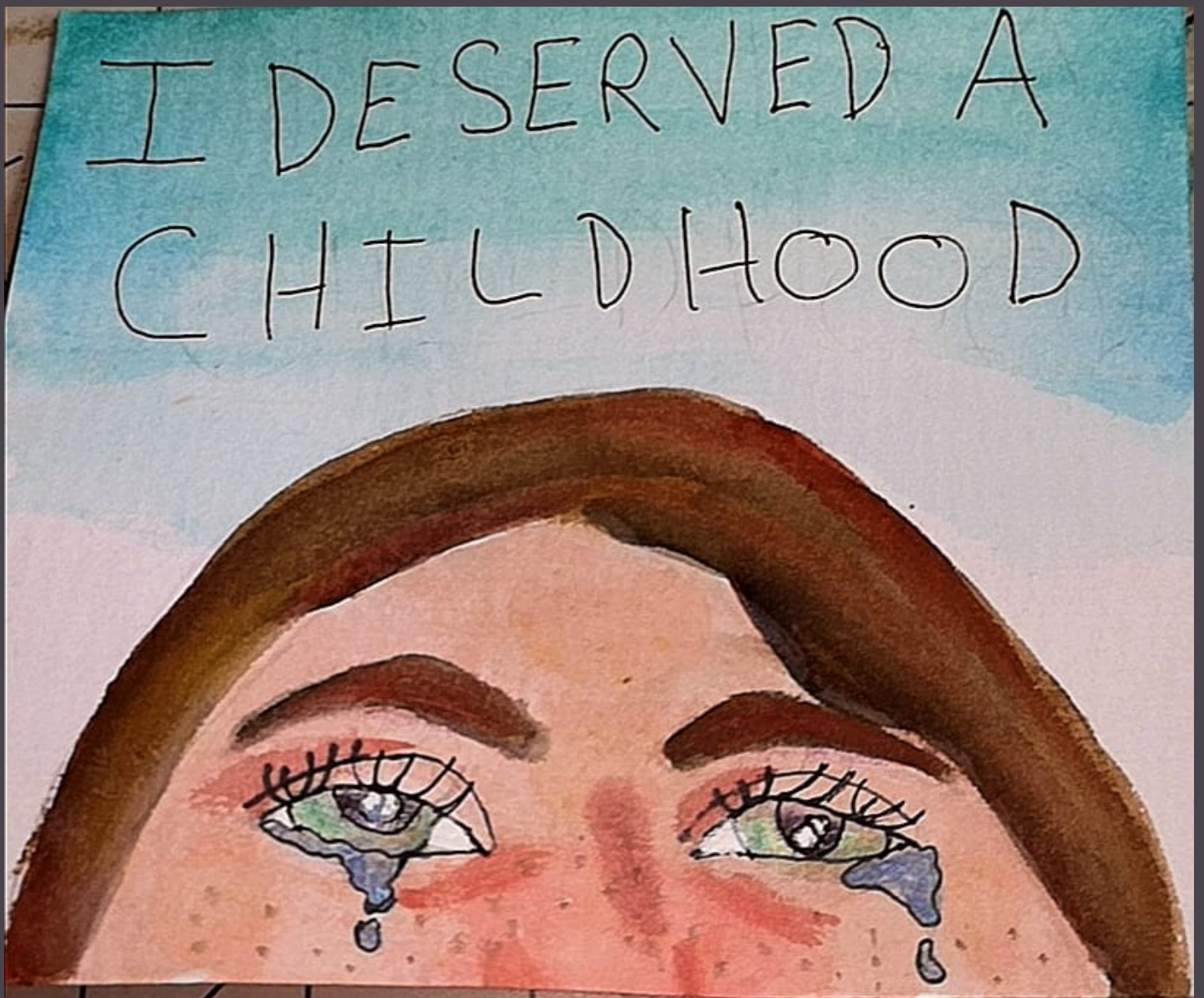


If something is too much detail, do not make the young person talk about it. You will be able to tell through body language if they are uncomfortable. **I felt very pushed from an early stage to discuss everything in depth.**



Hold off on the education until the young person is ready. This could simply be too much too soon. The young person is dealing with a lot and should not be educated until they are ready. By far one of the worst things in my support was being forced by the social worker in school to stay behind and watch some CSE documentaries the first day that I was in school after it had come to light. Hello... who is the perpetrator here!? I was not allowed to go home until I had watched them.

"Childhood"



"Don't Talk To Strangers"

To most children, adults are: the role models, the trustworthy ones and the ones you idolise. Sometimes adults can be scary as they're a lot bigger and more powerful than us as children. "Don't talk to strangers" is probably one of the most said bits of advice given to children. As a child it gives a false impression, what is a stranger? A person you see on the street? That one family member you haven't spoken to? Or your friends' parents that you haven't met yet? Children see their parents and family members speaking to strangers all the time and don't see any danger so of course they'll always be curious why "don't talk to strangers" is said so much; especially when those who are our role models, those who are trustworthy and those who we idolise can end up being the most dangerous.

"Don't talk to strangers" gives children the false sense that anyone close to us is a completely safe and kind person. Most of the time our family members, friends and those we trust are not dangerous, evil or horrible.

But sometimes they are even more threatening to us as children than our local shop keeper. Yet we are taught that because they aren't a stranger, they'll keep us safe and not hurt us.

So, it's okay if they touch me when I said no?

It's fine that they told me not to tell anyone, after all I know them so I can trust them, can't I?

They aren't a stranger so they won't hurt me, will they?

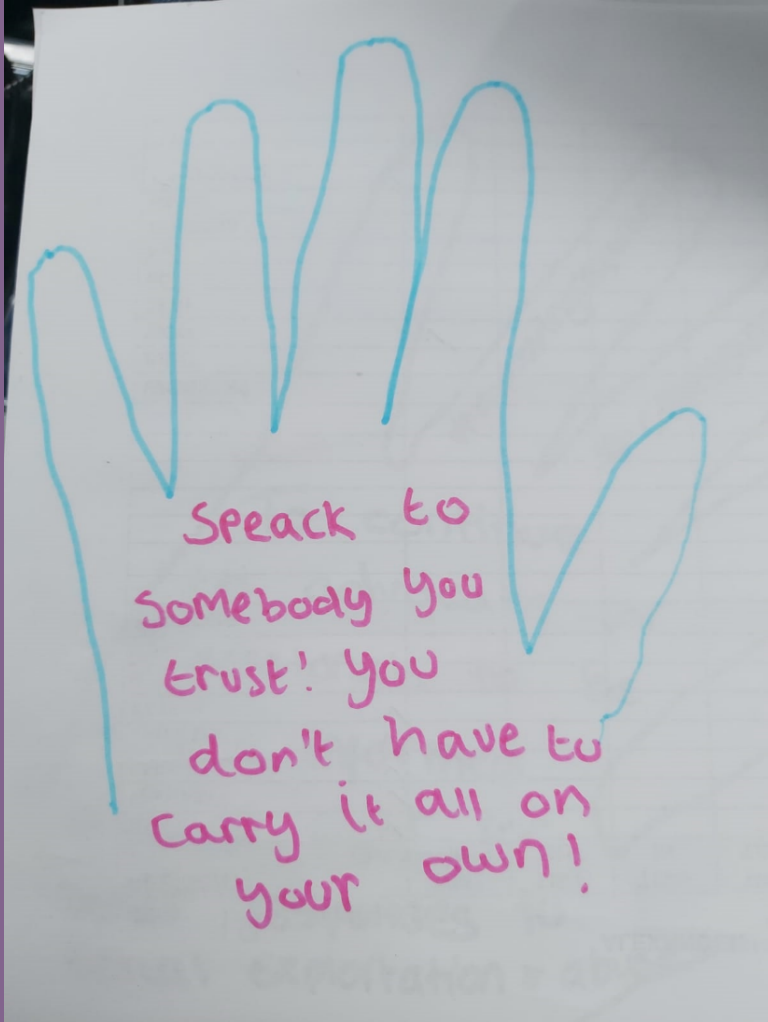
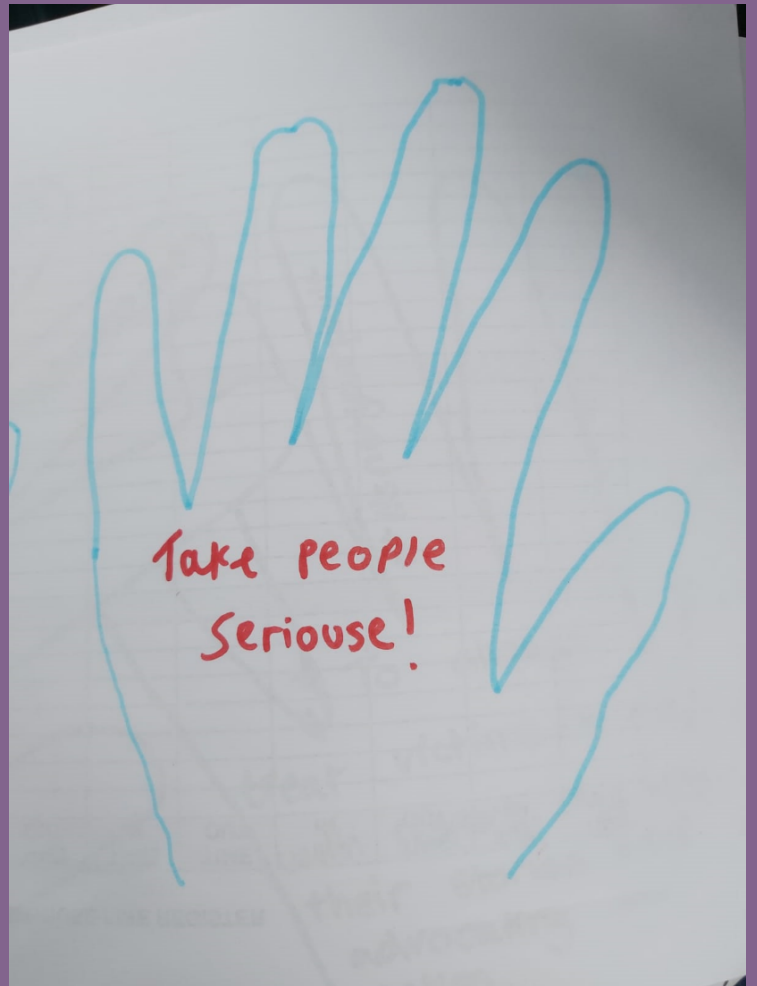
Who are you more likely to believe, the adult you know or an innocent child? Some people may answer that question differently to how you would.

People wonder why historic abuse that involves relatives and family friends doesn't come to light until years later.

It's because those are the people children are taught to trust.

**created and written by a young person who accessed
support from Basis Young People**

"Helping Hands"



"A Letter Written by a Young Person Moving On From CSE"

When I was 9 to 12 years old, I was groomed by who I thought was the love of my life – Rob (name changed to protect the young person's anonymity). See, I always understood that our relationship was wrong in the eyes of the law, but I really did love him, and I believed that he loved me. His actions never suggested otherwise. Well, that's what I thought at least.

Me and Rob met through one of my older friends. It took me years to finally agree to meeting him and before then we only spoke on the phone a couple of times. He would always tell me how beautiful I was, and how he would love me no matter what. He spoke to me like I was the only thing keeping him alive, and I believed him. I really believed him, he never lied. I was a mature 12 year old to say the least. I was out every day with friends, I smoked, I smoked marijuana on a daily basis and I was a trouble causer. There was never a day when I wasn't high.

When we first ever met, I was 12 years old and Rob was 19, very almost 20. We kissed and we cuddled, we had a few joints, but I was too nervous for anything else.

From being 10 to 13 years old, I self-harmed. I would bite the skin off of my hands until they bled, I would cut my wrists, hips, legs everywhere. I hit my head off of walls and I could go without food for days in hopes that maybe it would be enough to end my life. I also began to suffer from panic attacks toward the end of year 7, so I was just 12 years old. This was due to anxiety - which I still suffer with - and the stress of hiding my relationship and trying to keep him happy. Now, at 14 years old, I haven't self-harmed in over a year, and my panic attacks rarely happen.

When I was 12 years old, I thought I internally made the decision to sleep with him. He never tried to force me, and never made me do anything I didn't think I wanted to do, but I felt as though I owed it to him for being so nice to me. And for months, me and Rob met on a weekly basis. Sometimes we would meet in town and go for food, but others we would go to his and watch films or have sex. Nobody questioned our relationship because I looked a lot older than I was, and Rob looked younger. It didn't look wrong, or feel wrong.

During this time, Rob started getting very protective. I stopped seeing my friends to see him on weekends, and I stopped seeing my family as much because he would always want to be on the phone to me and we were trying to stay secret so he didn't get into trouble. He wouldn't let me talk to any boys, and if I did he would call me a 'cheat' 'sly bitch' and a 'user'. He was extremely jealous, but I thought that was because he loved me. I tried not to upset him. I gave him all of my social media passwords, and he checked them on a daily basis, always telling me if he didn't like someone or someone who I was speaking to. But I thought that was normal. I had never had a serious relationship with anyone else, and I thought it was because he cared about me so much and didn't want to lose me.

One time, I went out with my friend and a boy she was close to. Rob accused me of sneaking off with other boys and cheating on him. He overdosed on drugs. He blamed me. He told me that none of that would've happened if I just stayed home and didn't treat him like a mug. That night I had to ring an ambulance – at 12 years old- because my 20 year old boyfriend tried to blame me for his suicide.

From then, this pattern continued, and whenever he was upset or angry, I thought that sex was the only way to comfort him – so that's what I did.

But I didn't see that as grooming or exploitation, I just wanted him to be happy. He bought me lots of gifts. I never believed that was to make me sleep with him though, I thought that was just to make me happy, like you would in an average normal relationship.

During those few months, me and Rob would have sex at least 5 times a day on a Saturday – no questions asked. It felt like that was one of the major ways that we connected. The thought of being used never crossed my mind until I began my work with Basis. He would constantly call me a slag, telling me how he bet I'd slept with lots of other people behind his back. But I was never disloyal to him, and I gave him everything we wanted- especially sex. But because I was a mature 12 year old and didn't like to be thought of as a child, I thought it was okay because I had agreed. I gave my consent.

What I didn't realise was that what happened to me was statutory rape. What I didn't realise was that he made me believe I had agreed. He had manipulated me so much that I believed I had a choice, but I guess I really didn't. I loved him. I loved him more than anything and if you would've asked me 2 years ago if I believed I'd been groomed, I would've said no. not a chance. But now, I think I believe it.

Even though I may not be typical 'street grooming' he used me and my body for his own needs, and made me believe it was my choice. It still hurts sometimes to think that maybe he never loved me, but I'm coming to terms with that. I'm okay now. I don't sit alone anymore, and I speak up when something happens that I don't agree with. I will not hold back and I will not be used.

Though I was sexually exploited, that doesn't make me any less of a person. I am human, and I matter.

5 Years On...

As an ex-service user of BASIS, I myself can appreciate how difficult it can be to overcome the barriers that you can be faced when dealing with CSE. I worked with BASIS for a little over a year, and I really found the ability to stay strong and understand that just because I was a victim, it doesn't mean that I always have to be, and over time it does get easier to deal with and come to terms with the things that ultimately changed my life. Now, I am trying to reflect on my experiences and show how far I have come with time to heal.

My original letter was a means of releasing the negativity I was holding onto, and to reach out to other young people in similar situations. I never thought that I would be able to face what had happened, or fully admit it - but now I'm almost 19 years old, with a boyfriend who has been with me almost from the beginning of my CSE journey, attending university (with an unconditional offer!), studying a course that I love and will in the future allow me to work with vulnerable people.

It can be hard sometimes to associate with the person I was back then, knowing how hard it was for me to be told I was a child, even though I felt like a mature adult. But now, as an actual mature young adult, I realise that the fact that I - and even the people around me - believed I was mature, played a massive part in how easy it was for me to be manipulated and abused. As a consequence of me being treated like an adult, and doing 'adult' things, I began to believe it myself and would be frustrated if people didn't think the same thing. I now know though, that even if I was mature, it wasn't because I was an adult or because I should have been treated like one, it's actually because throughout my life I had suffered from so many different kinds of traumas and hurts, that felt I had to grow up so fast and give the impression that I am older, in order to protect myself.

This was so that I could have friends, conversations and partners who I felt understood me on a more intellectual level – however I know that wasn't the case. This visage of 'maturity' that I had, gave conflicting messages about the sort of people I should be in touch with and also normalised falling in love with someone who had so much more power over me, even if at the time I didn't see it. It meant that the adults around me didn't trust or believe what I was saying or what had happened to me, because they too thought that I was mature.

This deterred my healing as a young person because it was hard to find a trustworthy adult who I was close to who believed what had happened, especially in school. I found that praise was one of my key motivators, as I had previously taken pride in achievements such as being 'better', or a step above my peers. It appealed to me to make seemingly adult choices at a young age, which played into being manipulated.

Even now, 6/7 years after my abuse, I can struggle to come to terms with the fact that it happened to me. I always thought that I was smarter. These years have allowed me to reflect on the person I was then, and instead of getting myself stuck back into the self-destructive ways and allowing my thoughts to get dark, I remind myself that my abuse doesn't define who I am, I do, and that life does get better. I didn't think for a second that I would ever be any more than what my abuser said I was. It is a constant battle to remind myself that yes, I was abused, but one thing he didn't take away from me is who I am as a person, and there is more to life than our bad experiences - they don't define us.

If I ever struggle or have bad days, I just think back on my journey, and the fact that it is my journey alone and I am allowed to feel like the world is against me sometimes. What I have to remember is to be proud of small accomplishments on those days, even though they may seem like nothing to someone else.

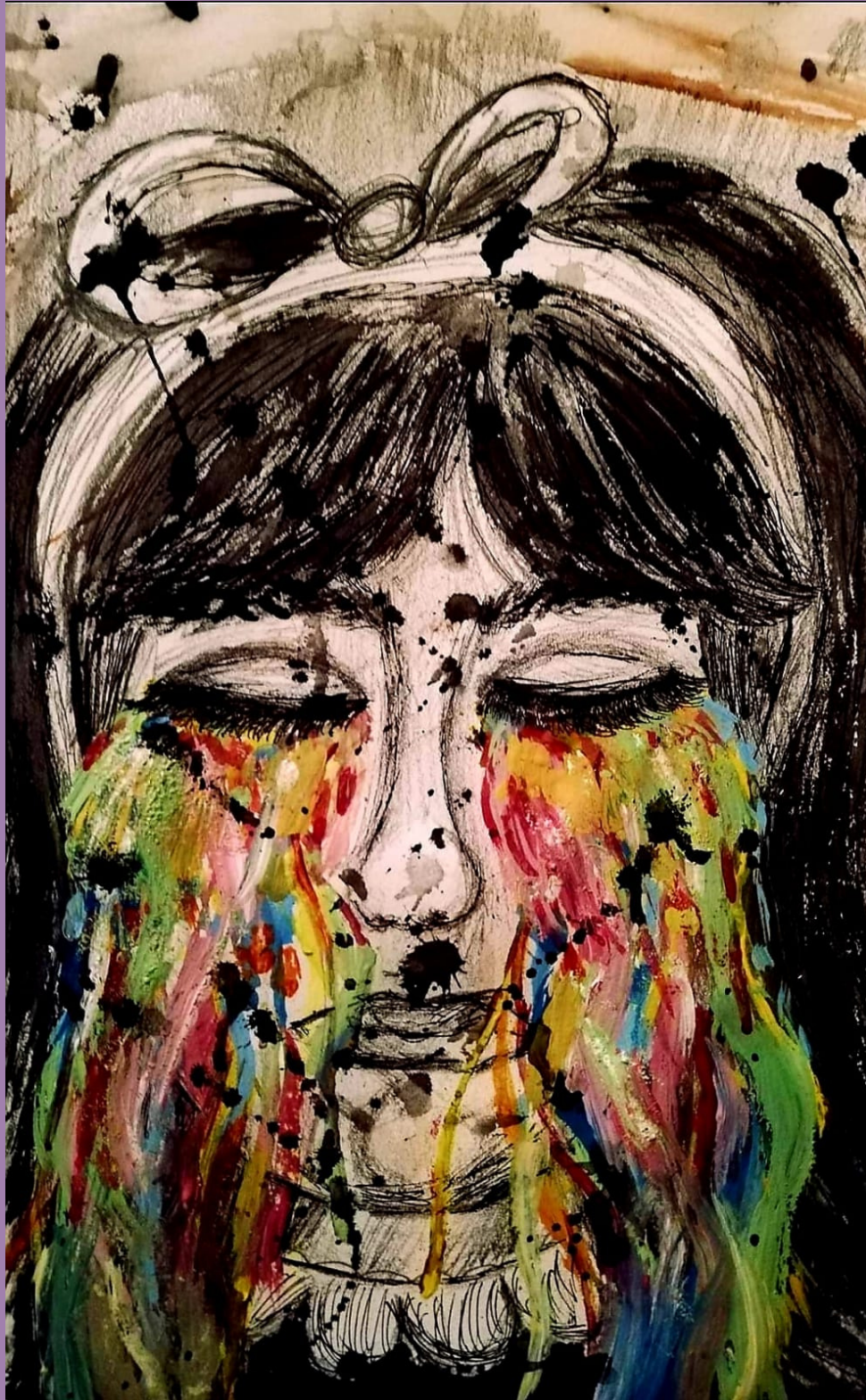
Something as small as brushing my teeth, making the bed, having a shower. I've found that this can really make me feel better, because we don't always have to be busy and hitting those huge milestones, because the small steps mean just as much.

My life has changed so much, and so have I. Something I always really hated was change, but as I've grown older, I appreciate the opportunities that may present themselves in its presence. For example, if nobody had found out about what was happening, it was likely that I still would have been none the wiser when considering my lifestyle 'choices'. At the time, those choices felt like the right things to do, and the fact that I was being manipulated made the more positive choices feel 'uncool', or not the best way for me to 'have a good time'. I would have continued to engage in unhealthy relationships with men I absolutely shouldn't be, and probably not gone to university.

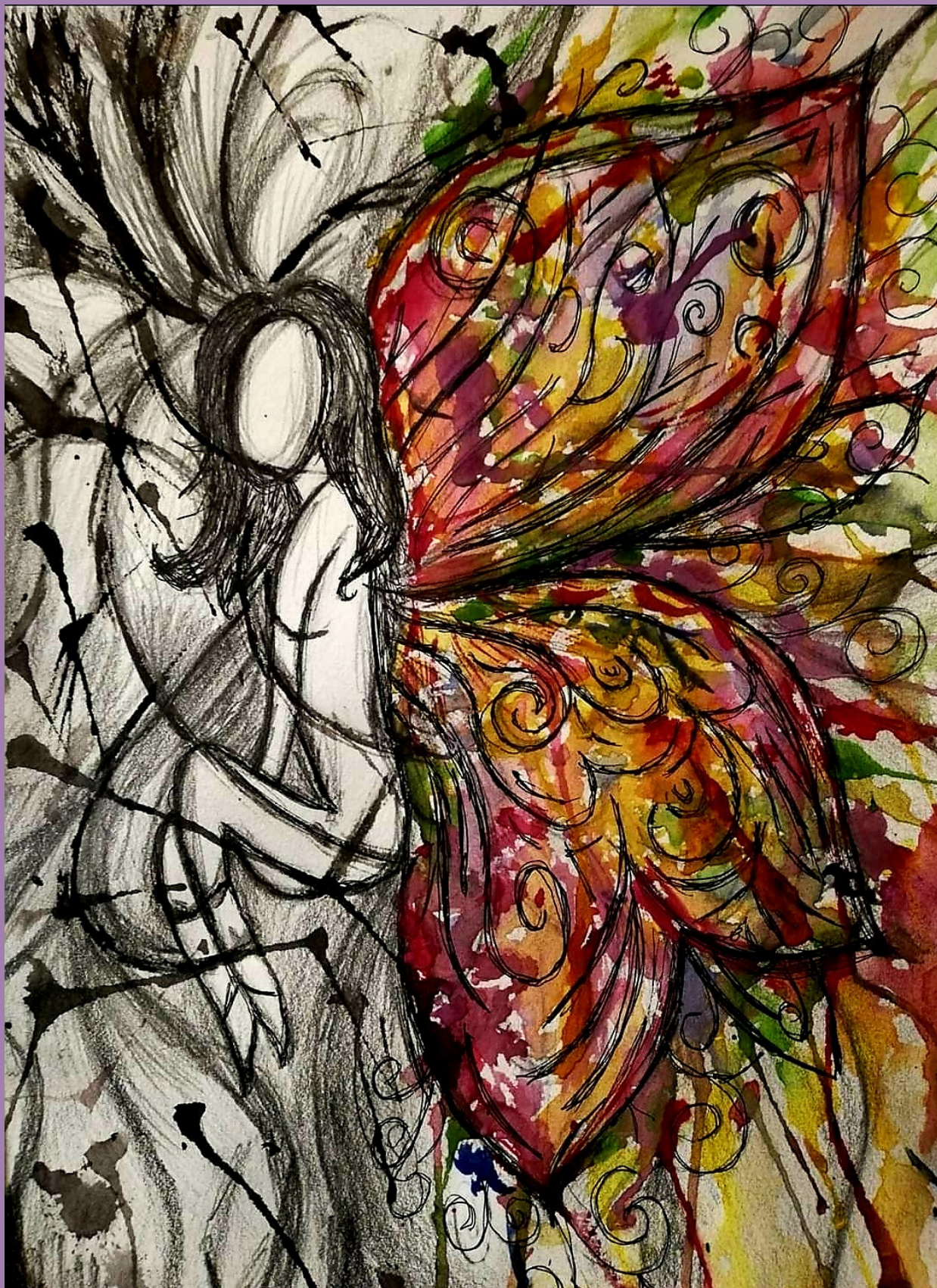
It is so important to be able to recognise what a healthy relationship is. For me now, that means feeling safe, loved and supported. Still being able to balance my own wants and needs in life, whilst also building a life with my partner. If your partner tries to hold you back, or makes you feel like any less than what you're worth, then they don't have your best interests. They would want you to excel in your career or hobbies, and they would want you to have healthy relationships with people around you – not make you feel guilty or ashamed for having a life outside of them. I found that the difference between an unhealthy/healthy relationship is the lack of secrecy, having a safe space to be myself and not do things just to 'please' them. At first, it was hard for me to appreciate compliments that didn't have hidden agendas, and make joint decisions as a couple with equal choices and cognitive abilities.

I still believe now what I wrote in my first letter – I am human, and I matter.

Artwork from a Woman Accessing the STAGE project



"...even though we feel dark and horrible, or the world feels dark and horrible, we are still full of colour that the world needs to see..."



"....trying to show strength, even when darkness is thrown at you..."

"Our Abuse is Being Used to Further Racial Arguments"

“Everyday I relive what happened.
Everyday it torments me,
Everyday I remember.
When I close my eyes its there.
When I sleep its in my dreams.
As I walk through life it follows.

I anticipated & accept this is how it is,
I anticipated & accept these feelings are normal with an abusive
past.

What I haven't anticipated & accepted is by speaking out, the
amount of people who try rewrite my truth.”

“There is a culture growing, sexual exploitation is becoming more and more a bandwagon for racism. Many survivors are speaking out about their experiences. But being put down or told their experiences aren't true, why? Because we are saying many of our abusers were also white men, Polish men, Chinese men etc. & this debunks the racial stereotype associated with sexual exploitation. **This debunks the racist followers who want to use sexual exploitation as an excuse to be racist...**”

"The media often reports of 'Muslim Grooming gangs'... [and] you are guaranteed to see many comments containing racial hate... saying 'our poor girls' ... **Now, if these people really cared for 'their girls' surely they'd be met with support for speaking their experiences?** No. In fact it's the opposite. Myself and survivors I have met online have started commenting our truths about our abuse. We state alongside the abusers who were Muslim, we also experienced the same abuse from many other ethnic groups."

"We ask where the outcry is about ALL the men who abused us... I can guarantee every time we comment our truth, we are met with vile comments. ... We have been told the attacks we have endured by non Muslim men weren't real, important or relevant. This hurts. Every single attack has affected us."

"Personally, my abuse included a whole range of ethnicities, jobs, ages etc. We speak out about our abuse and challenge the stereotype of 'Muslim grooming gangs' because we want the same public outcry for all the white British men, doctors, police, teachers, people in power, (the list goes on...) who abused us. I was equally as scared of the white British doctor who repeatedly paid to rape me as I was scared of the Muslim man who prayed after he paid to rape me."

"What is so sickening in this culture is survivors are being further exploited. Our abuse is being used to further racial arguments. We are being used to promote disgusting racial agendas. Our abuse is being used as an excuse for people to be racist. Haven't we been exploited enough?"

"We already feel disbelieved by the world and to be told your abuse isn't valid because it doesn't promote a racist agenda is horrible. It affects our self esteem and damages that strength we have tried to build to speak the truth. It mimics the abuse again, that we're not important, what happened wasn't important. That the world isn't going to care. That our voices don't matter. They'll always be overpowered."

It takes a lot for a survivor to speak out. We are talking about the most horrible things that have destroyed us. Its beyond frustrating seeing the media and the racist idiots rewriting our truths. I mean, we were the ones who were there?! Surely if they wanted to help 'their girls' they'd at least listen to them...? And that's how we know there's an issue. A true supporter would want to listen & would support survivors stories no matter what they say."

What it's like to be supported by Basis as told by young people

“They work to support the child rather than in general, they’re fair and on the same side as them”

“Any information about sex, grooming, abuse etc. Basis will give you, they understand how hard trauma is and they'll give you ways of seeing the signs”

“It's okay once you get comfortable at first I personally hated it as I had a guard up but once I got to know the person working with me it turned out to be okay just give them a chance”

“Consistent and helpful support”

“[The best thing about Basis is] Being able to... have an informal chat about anything that's on my mind and ask any questions I have”

“They focus more on one kid then putting multiple together.”

“[The best thing about Basis is] Learning about risks and how to keep myself safe”

“My worker was friendly and understanding and really listened to me”

“They actually take there time with you and listen to you”

“I guess they just genuinely listen and take in what your saying instead of doing a certain topic that you don't need help in”

“[The best thing about Basis is] Being able to express myself freely and not fear being judged”

“They helped me stop self harming and it's been nearly a year. It's still hard sometimes but they have given me coping methods and sometimes they work”

If our support is something you would like to know more about, we are here to help:



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ypreferrals@basisyorkshire.org.uk

You can also follow us on social media:



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