

31st March 22 Memories of your time in care

Dear I

I'm writing as your Independent reviewing officer, having known you for the past 6 years. As I always tell you, we have never forgotten everything that has happened to you and it is important to remember and accept the past, both good and bad, in order to move on to the future.

This is why I have written a draft of your time in care. I call it a draft because it is for you to edit and change, from your point of view, things I describe may have felt very different and you may totally disagree with some of my descriptions or version of events. But it is important to make a start and not forget.

By the time you were 12 years old, we had become worried about your life at home and who you were spending time with. We knew that your Mum was struggling with her parenting of you and resorting to more and more punitive measures without the routines, guidance and boundaries you needed.

By the time you were 13 years old you were spending a lot of evenings at McDonalds in Kilburn high street until early hours of the morning, going missing overnight and eventually went missing for a month in August 2017. This is when the Local Authority first accommodated you. On your return home you shared with Sharon Maby from Children's society worker that you had stayed with a 30 year old man and at times he was being asked to do things you weren't comfortable with.

This was a traumatic and difficult time, as we felt your Mum couldn't keep you safe in her care, because you were being groomed by older individuals in the community and you needed to live apart from your family including your brothers and sister.

Moving to H in Walthamstow, you made good connections with staff members over time like Coelle, Shante, Samantha and Wellington who would always speak about you with optimism and affection. It was a home you would stay at for nearly a year and a half.

You were attending H in Camden when you first lived at H. Because we were worried about you travelling on your own, from Walthamstow to Camden, you accepted an escort so that you would get to school on time and return to the placement safely and eventually demonstrated you could be trusted to travel on your own and have your mobile phone returned to you.

You moved from H due to an incident of fire-setting in the classroom in October 2017. It was difficult to know the trigger for this but we thought it was possibly related to a contact with your Mum that did not go ahead as expected that would have been a real disappointment to you. Your education moved to A in Enfield on a trial basis, where you made good connections with some of the staff like Miss Gordan and Miss Weedon.

Your Dad W wanted to see you and Rochelle made arrangements for him to visit you for the first time in a long time.

Unfortunately you were not able to stay at A from March 2018 after several weeks of disruptive behaviour and perhaps you found the way they taught not accessible. There were many uncertainties during this time, with family members putting themselves forward to look after you

and assessments of whether your Mum would be able to make changes to keep you safe in her care and understand the risks of exploitation in the community.

Your Aunty S wanted to be considered as your long term carer, if your Mum was not in a position to keep you safe and well. You had by this time settled into H placement and made meaningful relationships with staff and some of the other young people so you had expressed you would prefer to stay where you were. We thought perhaps it was difficult for you to imagine living full time with your Aunt as you had quite different cultural identities and experiences. You weren't having regular contact with either your Mum and Dad at this point which was extremely difficult for you, as there were not clear reasons to understand why.

You started a new education provision in April 2018, B in Chingford. The deputy Head described you had settled in fairly well apart from lateness. You received a really positive End of year 9 report with your subject teachers describing your skills and abilities. Julie Parker and Fred Doyley were especially fond of you and you would even accept hugs from Julie when you wanted them.

In September 2018 you needed to attend hospital Accident and Emergency for smoking too much cannabis. You were introduced to Loveita from this point onwards to help you think about your drug use and exposure to Class A drugs.

H key worker Coelle was very positive about you in your reviews and your ability to achieve, describing you as, "an absolute pleasure" to work with

Ricky and Courtney helped your Dad to meet up with you, but he had many difficulties and instabilities in his life which made him unable to always be reliable and it was frustrating for you when he didn't show up after he had promised he would. This was understandably very difficult for you to experience and we perhaps regretted being so optimistic about the his abilities to fulfil his promises, even if his intentions were in the right place.

By November 2018 we came to realise you were travelling back to Kilburn on a regular basis. Your exploitation and safety were at risk and we were worried about your emotional and physical safety as so much was unknown. You were refusing to attend school by this point and we felt the pulls of exploitation, possible threats and incentives were stronger than the pushes of attending school or coming back at curfew. By December you had been refusing contact with your Mum.

By January 2019 you had distanced yourself from Wellington and Courtney with who you had good relationships before. We thought it was likely so you didn't have to answer awkward questions about how you were, where you were going. We were worried about you as you were often returning to the placement hungry in need of money, and your room became messy.

April 2019 Wellington explained he wanted you to sign a contract relating to your behaviour to make your placement more stable. By May unfortunately the placement with H came to an end, as it was too risky when you were playing with lighters and setting fire to a mattress and sheet in a bedroom. This was huge blow as this had been a place of stability for you. We felt that having been let down by family members who had been unable to regularly commit to spend time with you no doubt contributed to your feelings of anger and frustration.

When you understood the placement was coming to an end you went missing. You had difficulty regulating your emotions and behaviour at this point. You were experiencing many exploitative situations in the community, you did not feel safe enough to share but we were increasingly worried.

This came out through in your behaviour in the home, damaging property, picking on other young people in placement, playing with lighters and setting fires.

You had said you hadn't wanted a foster placement previously, but we knew C was a special kind of foster carer, who you would identify with. He was very experienced, calm and thoughtful.

In June 2019 you were arrested in NW6 5DD. You were found sleeping at this location with 3 others on the landing with a kitchen knife under you. In July you were arrested again in NW6 this time with Crack cocaine in your possession. C acted as your appropriate adult each time to help you in your interview with the police. You worked with YOS to complete your 9 month referral order. Samia your YOS worker really liked you and you got on well, she was flexible with her expectations and was pleased when you did what you said you would do.

You had started at O in Tottenham by this time and in August Rochelle submitted evidence around your exploitation and a National Referral Mechanism was granted on reasonable grounds to believe you were experiencing exploitation and a victim of modern day slavery.

By September you had gone missing, though still keeping in touch with C, who was worried about your safety and continued to encourage you to come home. C tried different tactics to stop you going missing, he wanted you to join his family picnics or plan travel to the Caribbean. He would be patient sometimes, other times tell you directly how worried he was, stop your allowances and other times try and persuade you with meals out.

On 14th October 2019 you attended a hospital in Lister, Norwich with a serious stab wound to your arm and were admitted for surgery. C stayed with you and you were visited by your Mum and Dad. The injury and the surgery left you in a lot of pain and it was difficult time. You were angry at first that your Mum and Dad had come to visit but did allow them in after Tyrone and C supported you. You left hospital after 3 days and returned with C to Tottenham.

You underwent surgery. The surgeon described "the nature of injuries will have significant impact on the patient. Not least because he had completely severed 5 tendons on the back of his hand (responsible for the ability to extend his middle, ring and little fingers) and also the nerve supplying the skin overlying that area. He will require significant physiotherapy to aid rehabilitation to regain function of his injured hand. He may suffer risks of stiffness, delayed healing, persistent numbness, and although children recover well, this is not guaranteed. Furthermore, given his ethnicity, he is at higher risk of forming keloid scars. This in itself can cause discomfort and hinder rehabilitation. He needs to adhere strictly to physiotherapy regimes for tendon injuries and he needs to look after his scars to prevent potential keloid formation."

In January 2020 You were trafficked for county lines purposes over in Grays Essex, Exeter and Newton Abbot, Ivy Bridge, Devon and Plymouth over a week.

On 23rd January you were found by police in the back of a car driven by two adults who would later be charged and found guilty of modern day slavery and people trafficking. You were with two other young people and had been plugged with a large amount of crack cocaine. We later discovered you had been contacted by the traffickers whilst they had been remanded in custody and subject to long and lengthy phone calls, no doubt putting you under enormous psychological pressure not to speak to the police or those in authorities.

Rochelle would often visit you and was your social worker for a long time, knowing how you would try and avoid or put off difficult conversations, but you were always polite, reserved and occasionally smiling at her jokes!

There was serious consideration for you to move to a specialist residential unit called L, out of London. We thought this would be a place that would keep you safer and disrupt those that were exploiting you. You were slightly interested but refused because you disagreed you were being exploited or at risk.

April 2020 It was your 16th birthday and your mum wanted you to visit family to celebrate. It was an incredibly difficult time, as C suddenly got very unwell and was admitted to hospital with shortness of breath and chest pains.

Tragically, C lost his fight for life and passed away in hospital. Janine and Natalie visited you at C's home and told you the incredibly traumatic news that C had sadly died, despite the best efforts of the doctors. Ryan came to speak to you and acknowledged that you and C had finally formed a meaningful relationship so it was extremely sad day for all and remains an incredibly painful loss.

You were not given the opportunity to say goodbye as we would have hoped and we are yet to obtain a good quality photograph of C for you. As a consequence you moved to A Islington and met Monet and Maya who understood the difficult circumstances of your move. You were able to listen to Maya's offer of support and acknowledgement that you would be experiencing grief.

You were going missing frequently, seen getting into cars and under the influence of substances. In June 2020 you were arrested again with Heroin and cocaine but denied being exploited or selling it for others.

In August 2020 you were assaulted in Oxford circus and in October you called staff to help you as you were being chased by individuals threatening you.

On 30th October you were found in a property in Norwich in Norfolk with adults that were dealing drugs. You were not willing to describe what had happened, but it appeared you had been trafficked for the purposes of county line drug dealing again. By January the previous traffickers had been found guilty and sentenced, Rochelle visited to show you news reporting of the incident with the hope that this would make you feel safe from them.

In January you were again arrested on Edgware road on and found with £400 cash in your trainer and was in the company of known local gang members.

By March 2021 You had even completed an online course over a week for "Team leading/Group working" were engaging with online tutoring and received an offer of a college placement at W, with other young people on zoom. You completed the three day course. You had stopped going missing since January when you were stopped and searched by police in Tottenham estate. Monet said you were spending more time in the communal areas, had developed a good relationship with Maya. You were joining the weekly house meetings on Friday and participating in cooking sessions. You were offering other young people to try your food, shared jokes and even encouraged and convinced another young person to complete the online course, after they were hesitant. You had shared that you no longer wanted to find yourself in the situations you had previously.

As you were spending more time in A Islington you had started to engage more with staff however, they became increasingly confused by some of your behaviour that they hadn't seen before. We

recognised it was the anniversary of C's passing your 17th birthday and perhaps you were trying to make sense of so much you had been through.

We tried to reassure A Islington that your behaviour of throwing food around and disturbing the neighbours was likely to be in relation to your life experiences. However, unfortunately they felt unable to give you the right kind of care and responses and eventually a new placement was needed.

We thought very carefully again about your next move, given the number of different homes you had had by this point. We had to weigh up whether returning to Camden would be safe for you. On balance we thought it would be positive to be closer to your family and all the support services that could help stabilise things, such as education and employment opportunities.

Rumon became your new social worker and has helped you settle into the new placement.

You liked your new room which was spacious on the ground floor and close to the front door. Lena and Bushra have got to know you quickly, offering walking and talking support sessions and we heard recently how Annie likes to teach you cooking and helps look after your hair. It is still early days at K but you have already surprised and impressed everyone by trying out college for a few weeks on your own, staying in contact with your Mum and Dad, remaining in the placement and accepting the help on offer with cooking, shopping and budgeting. You are starting to have honest and open conversations about how you are feeling and thinking. Everyone is optimistic about your strengths and skills, you have shown enormous resilience and we know you are able to achieve all sorts of things when you give things a go.

The next few pages are blank and are ready to be filled with the rest of your story...

Wish you the best of luck for the future,

Take care

Sarah

Independent Reviewing Officer