

# CARE LEAVERS FORUM

## DISCUSSION ON UNREGULATED ACCOMMODATION

Article 39

June 2020

In response to the Department for Education's consultation on unregulated accommodation for children in care, Article 39's Director, Carolyne Willow, held a group discussion with Beyonce, Boyle, Calum, Edward, Jahnoya, Kris, Malachi, Samantha, Sheldon and Tasha on 10 June 2020. This was observed by a Department for Education civil servant.

We are very grateful to all those who took part, and to Barnardo's for making it happen.

### What the individual person needs

**Edward** – how do we actually know the difference between regulated and unregulated? Who tells us? The divide between different age groups is also artificial. We're focusing on 16 to 18 year-olds but a lot of supported accommodation goes up to the age of 25. There shouldn't be a blanket approach – must be what the individual person needs. Seems like there's an expectation that everyone will go through supported accommodation; young people are pushed into it when they get to 16, and sometimes earlier.

Before 18 you get more support, but it shouldn't be that different after 18. Seems that you get more if you are clued up. Been in unregistered and registered and didn't find a massive difference between them – in handling bills, getting warnings and negative behaviour therapy. As for eating meals together, this might happen once a week or every two weeks in supported accommodation but never experienced sitting down together on a regular basis.

### A house without parents

**Malachi** – found the experience of being in unregulated tense and awkward. It's like a house without parents. Been in a place with 25 rooms and one with 8 rooms, felt awkward in both. Home is where you feel like you belong. With placements, you just keep moving around. Never felt like I've had a home, a place that's familiar.

Signed into care just before 16<sup>th</sup> birthday went into semi-independent straight away then was made homeless after 'kicked off' there. After being homeless for two weeks, local authority placed him – Malachi suspects they deliberately waited until his 16<sup>th</sup> so he could be placed in unregulated again.

## Lucky to live close to Mum

**Sheldon** – came into care aged 16, was in two different foster care placements then children's homes before going to an adolescent support unit which helps families who are breaking down. Had to stay in a police station for 24 hours waiting for a placement. Can get very tense living in supported accommodation because you are living with someone who is older. You have to be careful of treading on their toes. Feels lucky though to be living less than three miles from her Mum.

## Should have had advanced DBS checks

**Callum** – was in semi-independent between the ages of 16 and 18. Feels his experience was a lot different from most people. Didn't feel safe. Staff should have had more advanced DBS checks. He got along with everyone, and the support was great, with the exception of one member of staff. He committed a very serious crime against Callum. Callum couldn't turn to his PA for help; he worked through an agency and the trust wasn't there. Callum then spoke with the manager of a children's home he had lived in before. He helped Callum.

## Instilling isolation

**Tasha** – her experience of supported accommodation was lonely and isolating. Was in care from the age of 7 and moved into supported accommodation a week after care plan ended. Tasha's experience of supported accommodation is that it is almost instilling isolation, like it's deliberate. Friends have to have official ID to visit – like a birth certificate or official letters. Staff are mad strict and issue warnings to young people. If you get 8 warnings, you'll be kicked out.

*Others in group have the same experience as Tasha. Sheldon said you need a passport or a provisional licence. But none of her friends have these documents. They can't afford to get these documents. This means that not only is Sheldon sad, she is also lonely.*

## Borstal-type accommodation

**Edward** – this is basically borstal-type accommodation. You're at a financial disadvantage, on a low income and you can't afford to pay for support as well as your rent. You can't get a job that pays enough. Then basic things – like going to the pub or cinema – don't happen. All that's left is sitting round together watching TV. But then without ID you can't even have your friends in your own room/flat.

## Like you are in prison

**Tasha** – it feels like you are in prison. There's staff on during the day and then at night there's security guards. Her friend had to take a passport – it felt a bit embarrassing for Tasha. Also has to be in her flat at certain times, otherwise she gets warnings. Basically means she doesn't do much.

## Rushed into hospital with damage to lungs

**Beyonce** – was in foster care which broke down before her 18<sup>th</sup> birthday. Had been there for many years. Beyonce was told she wasn't welcome anymore. Feels she's in a one-man street – on her own. When she needed a guarantor for her rent, foster parents refused. She nearly ended up homeless. Social care kept saying they would teach her how to cook but they never did. Beyonce only saw her PA three times between the ages of 18 and 21 years. Has felt on her own all her life – has literally had to do everything on her own.

When Beyonce first moved into her flat, there was mould all over and poo on the floor. She went to the council to complain but felt that she was taken advantage of because she was just 17 and on her own. They didn't have to take her seriously. She was rushed into hospital with damage to her lungs caused by the mould. When Carlyne asked if anyone checked up on her, Beyonce laughed at Carlyne – this is because no-one did. However, she now has a PA who is second to none. PA wants to be constantly updated about Beyonce's university course – genuinely cares.

## Rescued by the police

**Kris** – struggled with semi-independent accommodation. The local authority moved him into his own house at 17 years with 9 hours a week support. He couldn't manage, so he was put in dispersed housing. There were drug dealers there and Kris had to be rescued by the police. He was then moved to a Bed and Breakfast. Kris had been in care since he was 3 years old.

## Keep the door locked and ring police

**Beyonce** – this is doing us dirty, putting us in dangerous situations. Supported living provider said she could move into another house. She was horrified. The kitchen was not intact, the drawers were broken, the freezer didn't work. There were drug weighing scales. Beyonce had to stay there for two months. Then she spoke with another worker and she was moved again. At this new place young people were using drugs, inviting their mates over and Beyonce was threatened by a male. She had to get advice – she rang her Mum who said to keep door locked and ring police. Police then removed Beyonce to her Mum's address. Supported living provider then said couldn't help anymore. Has moved around since then and is now in a property belonging to a housing association.

## Alone and abandoned

**Boyle** – didn't really have good experience. Felt alone; never really listened to. Moved in at 17. Kept arguing with foster carers. Was still at college at the time. Was moved into a flat after 6 weeks. It was OK at first but as the months carried on it was very difficult, Boyle didn't feel safe. Felt alone and abandoned. Most of the staff were really cold to him but really nice to others. Friend had the same experience. Boyle felt like he couldn't talk to staff. Had to change support workers. One of them was really bad. When someone died, the support worker told him to get over it. Boyle couldn't have friends round because they had no ID. He felt really bad and really alone.

Before going into care, Boyle had been living with a family member from the age of around 8 or 9. Then was in foster care with his younger brother. After 5/6 years with the same foster family, he was moved into semi-independent accommodation. He talks now and again with his foster carers. Didn't really get much support from college or from the accommodation. Boyle was feeling isolated, alone and not safe, so quit college.

## It's scary, isn't it

**Jahnoya** – it's a challenge living in supported accommodation. It's a difficult environment, it's scary isn't it. You're living with people you don't know; you're threatened. People are not looking after you. When you're in care, you get an alright experience in care. Been in care 8 years. Semi-independent was really great. Felt like had a bond, was treated equally. Felt like staff treated me with respect and like a human being. They understood me as a person.

## They should step back and think how we feel

**Samantha** – it is difficult if you're like in assisted accommodation. You just get the basics. In a flat now. Staff expect a lot. There's a lot expected of you when you're 16 to 18. It's not easy when you haven't got parents or siblings or sometimes even friends. They should step back and think how we feel.

Flat checks don't feel good. They check everything is clean. Use WhatsApp. It's hard to get motivated when you're feeling so down. If it's not tidied, you don't want them seeing it. But you get warnings. It takes me time to do stuff.

*Others explained about warnings – can happen for fights, coming in late and missing support sessions.*

*Carolyn asked everyone if they felt anyone had their back. People laughed at Carolyn and asked her if she is crazy.*

*Then Edward said he does feel he's had someone who has his back.*

**Beyonce** – those people who've got your back, anyone can say they've had my back but they're not going to be around for ever for me.

## Felt like an alien

**Malachi** – never really felt anyone has my back. Only me. The professional I adore the bones of is Bev. She's so proud of me. Malachi has seven things on his criminal record, all from his time in semi-independent. He felt like an alien. One offence was throwing a drink in the sink and it broke a plate. Staff in semi-independent change left, right and centre. They have no time to be passionate. He got done for ABH which meant he couldn't have anyone in his flat, even his girlfriend. A staff member was stood in a doorway and he pushed passed her, that's how he was charged with ABH. He always felt that he couldn't argue, that the power balance was against young people. Always felt like you're little to them. It was a really lonely place to be. Professionals just think we're angry but we see our friends with nuclear families and everything.

## You have to be like Bear Grylls

**Beyonce** – it's fight or flight. Every human being on this planet has fight or flight. It's labelled as behavioural but it's how we've learned to survive. It's a survival system. You have to be like Bear Grylls – and survive – it's the only thing you know what to do. And then you're automatically penalised. If you're not naughty, you're overlooked. You don't have a Mum or Dad, they forget that.

**Callum** – agree, it's fight or flight. Took up boxing and then people said I was learning how to fight. It felt like staff in the children's home were making me angry. But boxing gives you self-respect and discipline. People try to wind you up.

	<i>One word which sums up your experience of care</i>	<i>One word which sums up how you would like others to experience care in the future</i>
<b>Beyonce</b>	Survival	Belonging
<b>Sheldon</b>	Dehumanising	Empowering
<b>Malachi</b>	Unpredictable	Family
<b>Kris</b>	Car-crash	Awesome
<b>Edward</b>	Corporate parenting	Parenting/family
<b>Jahnoya</b>	Journey/whirlwind	Brave/strong
<b>Boyle</b>	Blocked out	Humanising
<b>Tasha</b>	Tick-box	Nurturing
<b>Callum</b>	Shit	Loving
<b>Samantha</b>	Storm	Connected

*Some names have been changed to protect people's privacy.*

*These notes were agreed by everyone who took part in the discussion before they were submitted as evidence to the Department for Education. Young people also gave permission for them to be published on Article 39's website.*

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