

Alison's story (a case study of a young person in care in Essex)

I wanted to tell you about my story as it will hopefully help other people.

I hated where I was living. My placement... I didn't feel a part of the family. They didn't care what I did or know if I was out. I didn't have any important people in my life. I was having contact with Mum but we weren't really getting on. The only person I used to speak to was my social worker.

School was absolutely terrible. I never used to go and if I did I'd just get told off. I wouldn't go to lessons... couldn't concentrate. I'd run away. I was always running away. I don't know how many times I ran away. If I added it up... my god.

Going out was a big thing because I never wanted to stay at home so I had to get out. Seeing friends was a big thing. Just seeing someone for the sake of it is fun at the time. Saying to your mates 'oh yeah I got this 22 year old mate who can get us drugs, come on let's go'. Do you know what I mean? I felt hard. Drinking alcohol was a big thing. I didn't take drugs a lot, but I sold them. I was selling 'cause I didn't have any money. It was just one of them things.

Yeah I spoke to my social worker. I said to her I can't deal with this and need to go. I need to go 'cause I was getting into trouble with drugs and stuff. My social worker she just kind of rang me up and blah blah blah, what's going on with your foster parents, do you like it there. I don't get Social Services. If I say I've got a good reason to move, I just need her to say 'actually you need to move'.

Things could have been different if I was in a different family and maybe was in another family that gave me love and included me. I spent Christmas there and I only got one present and everyone else got loads and loads of things. So yeah, if I had been with a family who actually supported me and taught

me things I needed to know, things would have been different. I would have been different.

"I had his number, he had mine and that's when it all started"

I met him outside a corner shop. He was wearing this blue snap back and he was hanging around with a few of my mates. Not my mates, but people I knew. So I thought I'd go up to him and say hi. Next think I know, I had his number and he had mine and that's when it all started.

This other girl, she met him as well at the same times as me. It was really weird, like we, like me and her were fighting for him. So I sort of fought for him when I shouldn't have.

All of my friends hated me for some reason. There was a few of them who used to say 'you need to get away from him', but obviously I didn't and was like 'no, whatever you're talking crap'. They don't talk to me now. It's just one of those things.

I was happy to see him at first. Then things changed. I think the first time I stopped liking him was when we ran away and he shouted at me for the first time. He scared me and I thought no I don't like it. I think that was the time it changed.

We kept running away and I got moved away from Essex. I'm not sure if my social worker knew about him, but she definitely knew I was with someone, she knew what was going on with alcohol, drugs and stuff. I got moved into a children's home. I still saw him, he came up and sneaked into my care home. It was actually really hard 'cause I sort of didn't like him. So things didn't change much because I moved out of Essex.

I didn't feel in control with him at all. I started thinking a lot more, actually what happens if I

do say something to someone, he would go to prison and his age and my age and I started realising that he is gonna get in serious trouble.

I was cold, I was tired, and I couldn't go on anymore. I dunno what clicked, but it was just one of them things. I was like I can't do this anymore. I just want my life back if you get what I mean.

I remember saying to the police officer thank you. That's all I remember saying.

I remember I was more worried about what he was gonna do. I remember thinking is he actually going to have to go to prison or am I going to have to face him. Will I see him walking down a hallway here.

I knew about child sexual exploitation at the time, obviously the news and whatever else. But at the time, it never clicked. I never ever thought that would be what had happened, but the minute they said to me that he'd been sent down for this, this and this, I finally had that realisation and it all fell into place.

I would have liked to have seen a plan about how everyone was going to help me after. And later on my care plan. Like would I be allowed out of secure?

“Did he really deserve to go to prison?”

I felt really guilty. I think knowing what I said was going to put this person in prison. In my head I thought, does he deserve it? Like it was really hard, really hard and I felt guilty for a long time. Through that time of court, I just felt bad because obviously I still liked him and y'know all that.

Even now I think, I'm glad I did it, but did he really deserve to go to prison? No one deserves to go to prison unless they have killed someone, like really nasty people. But he wasn't nasty and people like that I think

they should definitely learn their lesson... I was thinking too much about him.

I didn't end up going to court in the end. They said actually we don't need you there. I was relieved but annoyed too, because if they'd said to me like months before I wouldn't be needed I think I would have been okay, but I'd got myself ready, I knew what I was going to say.

I was actually really happy with the verdict and I thought I can breathe finally. I thought thank god, like I don't have to worry about it now until he gets released.

I actually have control of my life. I can make decisions for myself finally and I think that's such a big thing. I think it was one of those experiences that maybe I needed to go through? It's made me stronger and I know now that I will never get involved with anything like that again.

I don't feel guilt anymore. I just worry. Will he get killed when he comes out of prison or will he try and find me?

“Most of us aren't loved”

I always felt that love is so important. If you were loved way back in your past then it might not get as bad. That's why they call us vulnerable, because most of us aren't loved. And that's what they do, they go out there, looking for us. I didn't have that love, I didn't have cuddles, I had nothing and that's all I needed and he filled it.

The name of this young person has been changed to protect her identity

