



TAKING HOLD OF OUR HERITAGE

Giving the power of narrative back to care experienced young people so they can tell the stories they want heard about their lives.





Our vision is an inclusive and safe Leicester, Leicestershire and Rutland where nobody is left behind, and all children and young people are supported to reach their full potential.

We broker partnerships and create opportunities that enable the business sector to understand community needs, contribute to the growth of inclusive, safe communities and to support and inspire children and young people in their transition to the workplace.

Our leaving care projects partner with business and the local community to support care experienced young people to make successful transitions into independent living and education, employment and training. We also focus on supporting young people to use their voice, identify and raise issues of concerns and make changes to improve the support they receive.



The Leicester Y has been awarded £707,500 through the Heritage Lottery Fund's pioneering "Kick the Dust" funding programme and through this has funded the project "Y Heritage". This project is a collaboration between The Y, key civic partners such as our universities and local authorities, and the city and county's wide and

brilliant variety of heritage, cultural and creative organisations. The project aims to better engage young people with heritage across both city and county.

With thanks to National Lottery Players for their support, without them projects such as Y Heritage could not happen.



“WHY SHOULD CARE EXPERIENCED YOUNG PEOPLE LOSE OUT ON HERITAGE? WHY DO WE NOT GET THAT PRIVILEGE?”

The vast majority of care experienced young people do not have a ‘stereotypical family’ that are there for you through absolutely everything, no matter what happens. With losing your family or even just being distanced from them, you unfortunately lose your heritage. Family heritage is often passed down through stories spoken to you by elders and old weathered photographs with scribbled pen on the back. However, if you have been removed from your family, you lose those stories being told to you. If you have been removed from your family and entered the care system, there is a good chance you have moved from place to place many times, and the photos and keepsakes that connect you to your family get lost.

The Taking Hold of Our Heritage project is a chance for care experienced young people to discover and create their own heritage, take control of the stories they want to be heard about them and speak out about positive experiences of their lives.

There is a huge sense of community across care experienced people, and this project has allowed us to connect and reflect with each other. It has given hope and helped care experienced young people to feel better and more confident about their experiences.

This project has promoted positive thinking and provoked us to think about

our own positive experiences. In therapies, people are always told to look at and list the positives all the time. We don’t do that as care experienced young people and we are never encouraged to do so.

I do a lot of advocacy for looked after children and care experienced people and all anyone ever speaks about is the negatives. This is so unhealthy. It’s time to start turning these things around. We deserve to have our own heritage when our own biological families are often lost. Our stories are important and deserve to be heard.

Let us be heard, let us raise awareness and let us have our heritage.

Casey Armstrong

Care experienced young person.
Taking Hold of Our Heritage Apprentice.





TAKING HOLD OF OUR HERITAGE

WHAT IS HERITAGE?

Heritage is really wide-ranging and includes many things from the past that should be preserved for future generations. This does not mean it is solely historic sites or buildings, heritage can be made up of:

- Archaeological sites;
- Books or documents;
- Cultural traditions;
- Historic buildings;
- People and communities;
- Places and events;
- Languages and dialects;
- Landscapes and gardens;
- Memories and experiences;
- Places and objects;
- Natural heritage.

This project gave the narrative power back to care experienced young people so they can tell the stories they want heard about their lives. Care experienced young people are often required to talk about their traumatic past to professionals, support services and sometimes their peers. Telling the same stories over and over again can start to imprint on their identity and heritage. Young people in care often move several times which can result in photographs and family keepsakes being misplaced and lost. This project aimed to encourage care experienced young people to reflect on positive memories to change the narrative they tell about their lives, and recreate their own heritage artefacts.

In this book, care experienced young people have investigated the complex nature of their identity through this project and produced an archive of artefacts including oral histories, art and photovoice. The young people have investigated the memories and experiences of Leicestershire's leaving care community, by looking at themselves, but also interviewing and documenting other care experienced young people's lives.





KYLES



When I was in care I'd escape to nature. It would chill me out, help me change my mindset at that moment. It would remove me from the thoughts I'd have if I was inside at my placement. There was no special place, it was just about being in nature. The sounds of birds, water in the canals. Water always made me think about what is in it and what is passing by. There is a lot of life in it, it's fresh, it's life. I'd go there to cool off.

One of my foster parents celebrated every cultural festival there was. It's another distraction that takes your mind off of the things you are missing.

It reminds me of being a prisoner in the care system. I just wanted to be with my family. It is like a trap door. You're trapped because people have to prove this and prove that. Someone proving that they can take care of you, not harm you, others proving that you were in harm.

Bars remind me of being put in isolation at school for kicking off because of all the things going on in the background that no one at school knew about. You don't really know what's going on, because you're just a kid trying to process it all.



As soon as I went into care, I had hot food. I was clean.

It saved me.

LYDIA



This blanket means a lot to me. I was adopted when I was three years old and it was the start of a new adventure full of crafts, crocheting and arts. My mother taught me all I know, and she is the mother I wish birthed me from the start.

The blanket represents the bond we both share but it also represents my emotions. Each colour on the blanket represents my mood on each day I crocheted a square. Happy, sad, anger, calm and blank.

Crafts and art are part of who I am now, and I have taken after my mum.

Crocheting with my mum brings us closer and makes our bond stronger, because everything I know I have learnt from her.







Bump Sticker D/M/2019



AMBER



Due to my childhood and the way I felt like an outcast to my own blood, it always made me feel determined that when I had children, I would never let them doubt my love or our bond for a single second.

Having a child at 16, in an abusive relationship, I always made sure my baby knew nothing but love, security, and protection. I always felt because of the way I was treated when I was young, that I was destined to be a mum. It was always my dream job, never a singer, dancer or anything else young children say they wanna grow up as.

When I finally became a mummy, I became myself and that's when I felt like I'd accomplished my dream job. The title "Mum" then became my identity and I'll never ever regret or try to change that because I feel that being a mum was my purpose in life and they're the most important thing to me in the universe.

No matter what, I'll always try and do my best for them. To me, they could never be better, because they are already the best little people they can be.



They fixed me and made me the person I was supposed to be. I will never be able to thank them enough because they keep my story continuing and the battles in my head that become wars are overcome as I've got my children as my soldiers. No matter what, I'll never give up and that's all down to them.



MARTIN



The care system has benefited me. It's opened things up for me.

I came into the care system very late, and since then it has helped me build myself up by myself. It has given me a bit of drive.

The support that is there for me to access has really given me opportunities I don't think I would have had without being in the system. I've been able to explore different work environments from cafes like Zephs, learning to be a barista, to experiencing outdoor pursuits and working with my hands.

There is a feeling of community among care experienced young people. We talk and listen and share experiences that we can all learn from.

Everyone has their own unique way of dealing with life and how to get on in the care system.

It is designed to support us, even if sometimes it doesn't feel like it, but when you strip it all back it is there to support you to explore and help you find your feet into adulthood.

It's things like today, coming to an allotment and doing some wood carving. I would never have thought to try this if I wasn't involved in a support group that works with care experienced young people.

It is the first time I have really left the house in 5 months, since Covid-19 started. I live in supported accommodation, with some other young people and staff, so it is really strict on what you can and can't do to minimise the risk of bringing the virus into the house.

But coming here, being out in the fresh air and even seeing some dogs has made me feel alive again. It's lifted my spirits and boosted my mental health. I can feel it. Being able to see people's faces and have a face to face conversation feels so natural, but has been something that has been so hard to find over these last 5 months.

It's opportunities like this that are so positive for me holistically. Without being in care, I can't imagine anything like this happening to me.





SPOKEN WORD

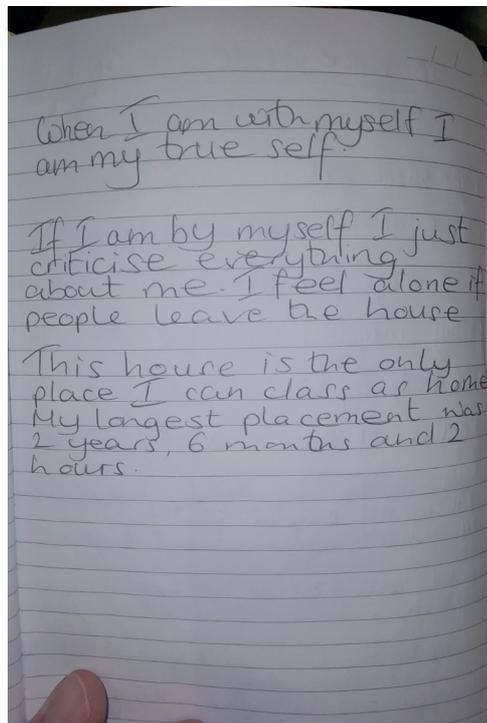
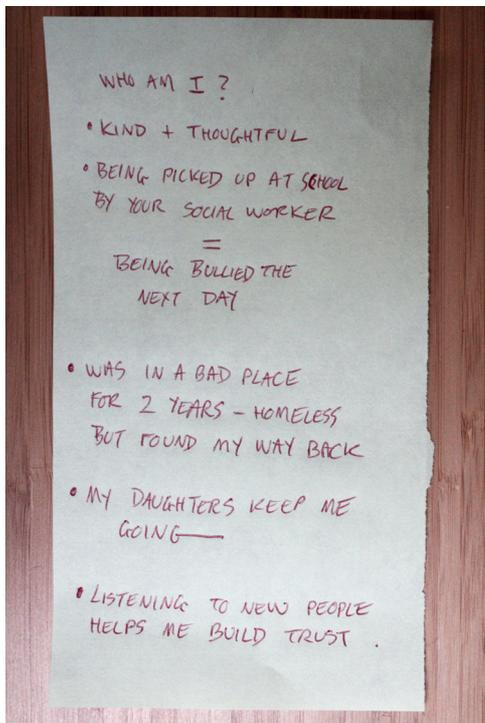


During the UK's first national lockdown, Leicestershire Cares invited spoken word artist, Ty'rone Haughton, to run six workshops online with our young people. Ty'rone is care experienced and had an immediate rapport with the young people.

The sessions involved creative writing exercises, reflecting on their experience

of the care system, looking at what identity means to them and what makes up their identity. The young people got a lot out of it, finding a new way to express themselves and explore their identity as a care experienced person.

These notes and scribbles give you an insight into the creative process and the young people's experiences.



“I AM FROM A PLACE WHERE FAMILIES
HAVE BEEN TORN APART!”

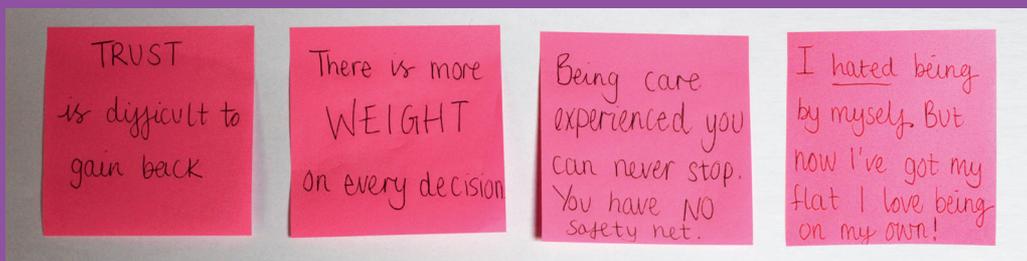
“I AM FROM A PLACE WHERE MY
FAVOURITE SEASON BRINGS FROST TO
YOUR FINGERS!”

“I AM FROM A PLACE WHERE PAIN
DISAPPEARS WITH THE FIRST CRY OF
A NEW LIFE!”

“I AM FROM A PLACE WHERE I FIND
SOLIDARITY IN THE NIGHT PRAYERS!”

“I AM FROM A PLACE WHERE PAIN IS
ASSOCIATED WITH LOVE!”

“I AM FROM A PLACE WHERE FISH IS
THE DISH OF THE DAY!”





FREEDOM



Freedom at the Centre Project in Leicester is a place where young unaccompanied asylum seeking minors and refugees come and be part of a community. It is a break from the isolation that faces many unaccompanied young people arriving in their mid-teen years and separated from parents or care givers.

Freedom is run by a small team of part time youth workers and volunteers. These people help the young people integrate into both the club and Leicester more widely. They help the young people improve their English, fill out forms, or read letters, and support them with their school and college homework.

As well as the classic youth work activities at the club - nurturing, listening, advising and preparing them for adulthood - Freedom works with outside organisations that come in and run workshops. These workshops give the young people a chance to try something new, perhaps find a new talent or show off one that hasn't been seen in a while.

Freedom recently held graffiti workshops, a running club, fire safety and crime prevention sessions that give the young people an insight into issues that a native teenager may be familiar with, but for someone experiencing a new culture, environment and society for the first time, these things would be a mystery to them.

Leicestershire Cares staff support Freedom and are building links between the group and the business community. We have also developed opportunities for the young people to voice and share their experiences and learning, so the system of support offered to asylum seeking young people can be improved.



Taking Hold of Our Heritage created a pack of playing cards that have questions on each card. The questions get the reader to ponder past experiences and positive memories. These cards were a great way to engage young people in conversation about their identity and heritage at Freedom.



YOUNG PERSON FROM GAHAN

“Barcelona is my team. I used to watch them in Gahan, outside the national radio station’s building. They project matches up on a big wall. I used to go there with my friend Manler (Mike). Since I have come to the UK I haven’t spoken to Manler. I don’t have a phone, and he has moved to boarding school, so I don’t know his address to send him a letter. He doesn’t know I am in the UK.”

NASEER, FROM SUDAN

My heritage comes from my home back in Sudan. It has its own traditions, its own language and in my home country we have a special wedding ceremony. The groom wears all white, including shoes, and the bride wears different colours. Food that my family would cook is also important to me. We would have lots of different sauces made with okra, coconut milk and the juices of meat. There was a lot of music with drums and a lot of dancing.

When I came to the UK, I got a lot of support from my support worker as he helped me to learn English and how to use a computer at my hostel. He has been supporting me for the past two years.

“CARA AT FREEDOM HAS ALSO BEEN GREAT HELP. SHE IS JUST INTERESTED IN ME AS A PERSON. SHE IS ALWAYS ASKING ME HOW I AM AND HELPS ME WITH HOMEWORK.”

ABDULLAH, FROM AFGHANISTAN

Since I have arrived in the UK there has been one person that has made a difference in my life and he is called Bruce. He's my English teacher at college and my cricket teammate. He's been there for me over the last 2 years.

I never had a social worker that lasted very long, especially once I turned 18, but Bruce has been great. He's funny and it is like he is from every country in the world. He can speak 5 different languages.

He has helped me settle into Leicester, by inviting me to play with his cricket team. He helps me with my English and also if I have any forms or letters to fill in or understand. He is always there for advice.

“IF I COULD SAY SOMETHING TO HIM, IT WOULD BE, THANK YOU BRUCE.”

KHALID



My name is Khalid and I come from Sudan. Before I came to Leicester, I was in France for 6 months, and after that I came here to Leicester.

When I first came to Leicester, I was living with my brother, and didn't know anyone else. But after one week I was lucky to meet Sulieman and Naseer.

They told me that they come here [Freedom], and they told me that the youth club was a good place to go and people go there to chill out. So I decided to go with them one night.

When I came to Freedom, I found Cara and Azra and another lady called Jayden, and it was full of nice people.

I get a lot of support from the youth club, sometimes I come here for some help with my education. Cara and Azra help me with reading and writing, and they help us with paperwork, like setting up bank accounts and I really appreciate that.

This club has really helped people. Good people work here, and I have to say thanks to them. If I have any problems, I come to Freedom first.

I've nearly been here for two years and 8 months. I feel connected to Leicester and the community. The only thing I know about England is Leicester. Most of my friends and community come from people that I have got to know from this youth club. Everyday I make new friends here.

What I would change to make life better is a tough question. Life is ok at the moment, I'm doing ok with education, and once I finish that I can get a nice job.

foodbank   HELP

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THOSE WHOSE
LIFE IS MADE MORE DIFFICULT BY THE
LOSS OF HOME OR OTHER MEANS OF
SUPPORT, WHOSE HEALTH IS WEAKENED BY
SUCH LOSS, AND WHOSE WELL-BEING
IS THEREFORE
IN DANGER, SHALL BE
CARED FOR.



SULIEMAN



I am Sulieman, and I came to the UK from Sudan in August 2014.

I came here as a 14 year old child, and before that I was in Germany for 6 months. I was struggling a lot in Germany. I have some longer stories, but I don't want to go into details there.

When I arrived to Germany, I quickly worked out that it was not the place for me. I made some friends, but not many. We all stayed there for 6 months and then decided to leave because at that time we were still struggling and there were some things we couldn't do.

The next place was France, and even there we struggled. We didn't get the right help we needed. Basically, we were homeless, we slept on the streets, under bridges, sometimes we eat, sometimes not. It was really a difficult situation.

Eventually, I ended up on a lorry and came to the United Kingdom. It was a horrific moment. I came here under the lorry, between the big tyres just holding onto something. We were just sat there on some metal. We were arrested right away that night.

I remember that there was a small vehicle following us and was flashing its lights at the big truck. When the big truck stopped, a lady from the car came over and said: 'Are you ok? Are you ok?'

It's the only thing I can remember understanding, and she gave us some water to drink and some chocolate and biscuits to eat. She called the police and left, and then 20 minutes later the police arrived and took us to a police station. That was my story of how I arrived in the UK. I was at the police station for maybe 24 hours, then I was taken to a hostel in Birmingham and kept there for 2 or 3 days and then they moved me to Leicester. In Leicester I met my social worker and in 5 months time she started to introduce me to Leicester and brought me to Freedom.

Freedom means a lot to me because it feels like a second home for me. When I started coming here, I was a bit lonely and felt that every time I went out, I wasn't feeling myself. I wanted to learn English as much as I wanted to do other stuff, like make friends. I'm a friendly person. My social worker, Miss Pamela, brought me to Freedom, and I met Cara and I met David when I was a little Sulieman, skinny and short.



I sat down with them and filled out some paperwork, but at the time I spoke little English. I could manage to give them my name and my date of birth, and then I started coming here every Tuesday and Friday and that is where my Leicester journey really started. I could get to know Leicester a bit more, and I met many friends.

Leicester is actually a nice place, it is a multicultural place, and I love Leicester. Everywhere you go you can make

friends, and the city is not too big but not too small.

The thing I'd like to change to make my life better would be achieving my goals. I want to finish education and then go to university. I like mechanics and fixing things, so maybe a career in engineering. A good education was my first goal when I was in Sudan, I couldn't go to school so this is really something that means a lot to me.



MOHAMMED



I'm Mohammed. I am 19 years old and I come from Sudan.

Before I came to the UK, I was in Sudan and then travelled across many countries to get here. I passed through 7 or 8 countries. It was a long journey.

When I came here for the first time I'd never been here before, I didn't know anyone. I came here in 2018, and I didn't have any family or friends here, I came as a refugee.

I was here in Leicester for 5 months, and I didn't know anyone. I was so lonely.

For those 5 months, I was always at home, or I would go to the Leicester market, or walk around the city. It's like you are new in this country, so you don't have any friends and you don't know about anywhere where you can go, so you just stay at home bored.

Eventually, I managed to make some friends, like Sulieman, Naseer and Khalid, and they were from Sudan.

It wasn't until I met these guys that they told me about Freedom where you can

go every Tuesday and Friday, so I came along with them and I found that the place is good. People were friendly and helpful. I started coming every week.

I like this place. I like the staff, Cara and Azra, and they show me respect.

I have one special memory of Freedom. It was the last trip I went on here. We went to the seaside at Skegness, and it was a good day spent with friends, and good food. We went for a swim and went on a roller coaster. That day will stay in my memory.

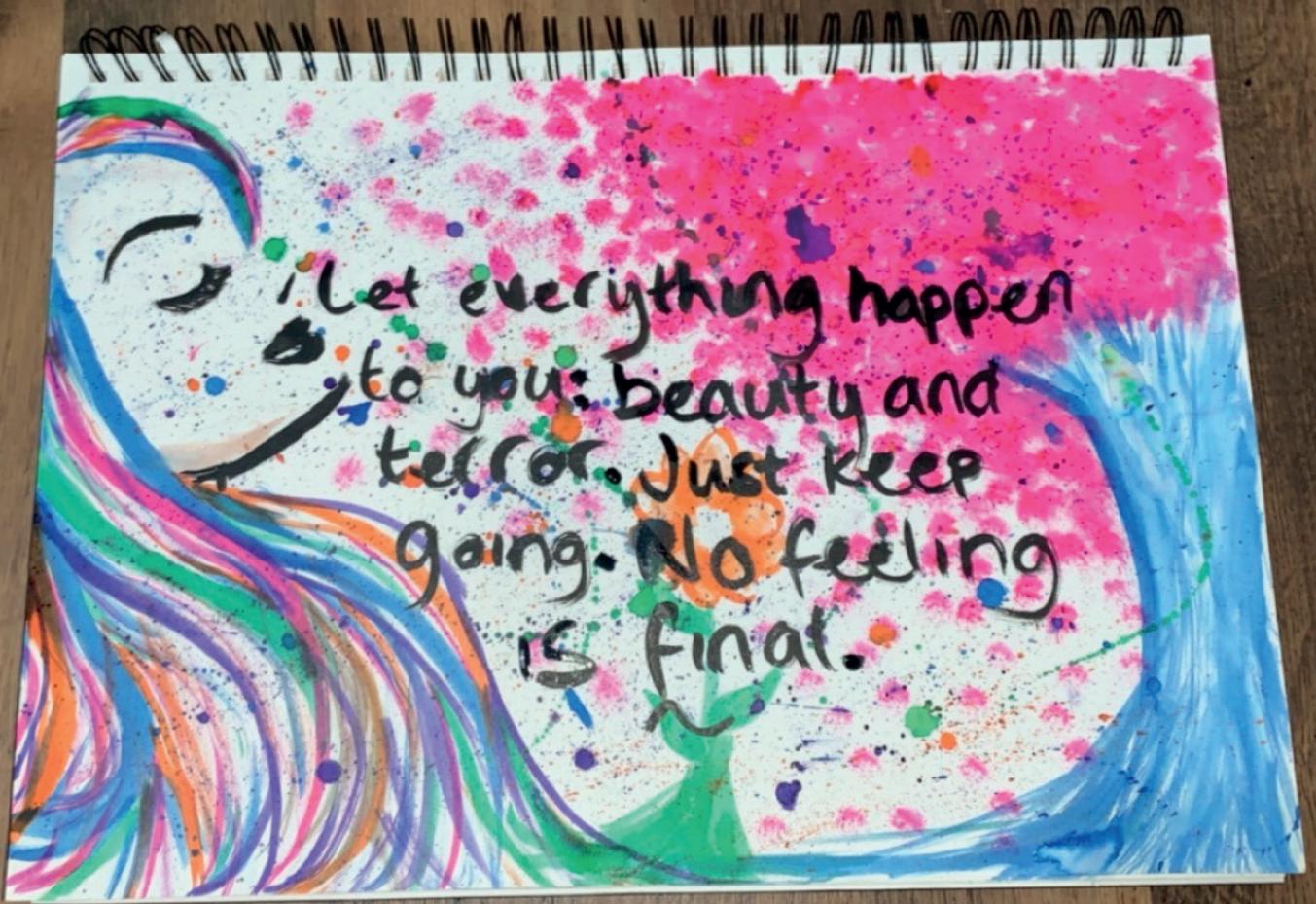
I feel much more connected to Leicester now. I've been here nearly 2 years and I know what I'm doing now and I know where I can go out. I come to Freedom, I have friends, I play football, I feel like I am connected to people. Feeling connected is what makes us human.

One important thing is to focus on education and that is what I am doing now. I need to finish college and then go to university. I want to do well and get my qualifications so I can get a good job and have a better life and carry on learning.



“LET EVERYTHING HAPPEN TO YOU:
BEAUTY AND TERROR. JUST KEEP
GOING. NO FEELING IS FINAL”

RAINER MARIA RILKE



CASEY



The idea behind it was that the flower and tree grew from the woman that represents myself.

That is why the tree and flower match the hair colours. They represent growth and also that there had to be roots for them both to grow.

Those roots came from myself so that, in a way, I have made my own heritage.

A person's roots generally refer to previous family members and their culture which is how I made that link.

The quote I have used is something I have decided to live by as I often live too much in fear of that 'terror' happening.



DIANA



Ethnic minorities are under-represented in ballet. Just like how care experienced young people are under-represented in higher education. I love the creative arts, I love to dance, play the piano, flute, guitar, alto saxophone, drums, clarinet and the violin.

Education has always been my safe place. From an early age, I knew that it was going to be my way out of the situation I was in at the time.

I went into care at 16 and had to go into a hostel. Most hostels have no age limit, so there I am, trying to get on with my A-Levels in a place that had all sorts of people living there, and no lock on the door. It was a difficult environment for me, and my mental health suffered. College was now further away but I didn't let anything get in the way of my education.

It made me resilient, motivated and determined.

There were three ways teachers acted towards me when they knew I was in the care system. The first was very softly softly towards me. They were too nice and made me feel like they were patronising me.

The second would tell me: "It's ok to fail, you've got so much going on in your life." I don't want to fail. What kind of motivation is that?

The third couldn't believe that I could achieve high grades while living in a chaotic environment and would accuse me of cheating. For me, that was the exact motivation I needed to show them.

I'm now studying a BSc (Hons) Medical Science at De Montfort University with the ambition to become a doctor. I've got here because I love to learn.





TAKING HOLD OF OUR HERITAGE APPRENTICES

Two young people worked alongside Leicestershire Cares staff on this project as apprentices. Without their creativity, ideas, passion and drive, we would not have achieved and produced the amazing work we have on the Taking Hold of Our Heritage project.

The young people played a key role in developing and delivering the project and gained skills as co-facilitators, peer researchers and communication professionals. We worked closely with them to identify their skills and the areas that they wished to improve and develop.

LAUREN, TAKING HOLD OF OUR HERITAGE APPRENTICE

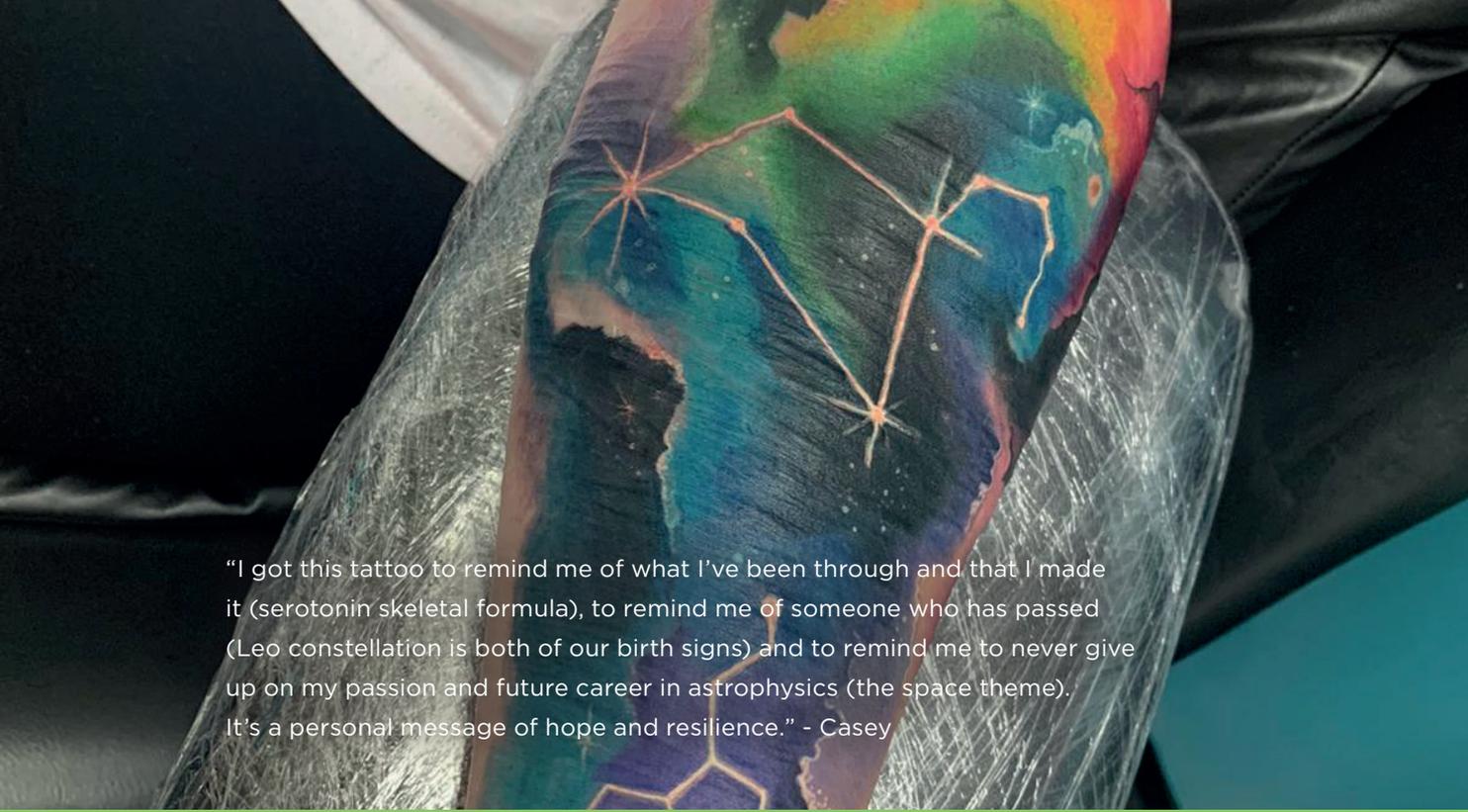
Lauren is one of our apprentices working on the Taking hold of Our Heritage project. Lauren provided support in researching venues for the exhibition planned for the end of the project, came up with ideas for activities that could be delivered to young people to help them create heritage artefacts and joined in with our weekly team meetings and supervisions.

Lauren is from the YMCA Y Heritage project and joined our heritage project

in January 2020. She has a passion for photography and journalism which she was able to utilise during the project.

As well as working on the Taking Hold of Our Heritage project, Lauren took part in several training sessions that Leicestershire Cares deliver to young people on other projects, including life skill workshops such as money management, mental health well-being and anti-hate.





“I got this tattoo to remind me of what I’ve been through and that I made it (serotonin skeletal formula), to remind me of someone who has passed (Leo constellation is both of our birth signs) and to remind me to never give up on my passion and future career in astrophysics (the space theme). It’s a personal message of hope and resilience.” - Casey

CASEY, TAKING HOLD OF OUR HERITAGE APPRENTICE

I’m Casey, and I’m a 20-year-old care leaver. Leicestershire Cares works to support me as a young, care experienced person but I also like to return that favour for them when given the opportunity. I have taken part in several things such as radio interviews, helping the pitch for the funding for the heritage project and even represented them for the Midland’s Care Experienced Conference.

After having been through the care system’s many failings first-hand, I decided that I wanted to take action. I work in several roles nationally and regionally, advocating and advising for care experienced people and

mental health. I am very proud of what I do. As much as I enjoy what I do for now, I have dreams of becoming an astrophysicist – the next Stephen Hawking!

Taking Hold of Our Heritage is important to me because heritage is a very complex thing to a care leaver. We often see it as negative, rejecting what should be our history. It is unhealthy to spend our entire lifetimes focussed on the bad. This project gives us the space to think creatively and create our own heritage; one that is joyful and offers hope. It is time us care experienced people start talking about the positives. All is not bad and it is important that we recognise that.

THANK YOU

Without the brave, creative and inspiring care experienced young people that have taken part in the Taking Hold of Our Heritage project, this book would not have been possible and you would not have heard their stories.

Thank you to Kyles, Lydia, Martin, J'vorge, Amber, Khalid, Naseer, Sulieman, Mohammed, Sophie, Diana, Lilly and the young people from Freedom.

Thank you to Carla, Azra and Eric at Freedom. You are doing some amazing work.

Thank you to Ty'rone Haughton for running our spoken word workshops. You can see his work on YouTube. Search for Ty'rone Haughton

Thank you to Liam Hadjipetrou from Creative Futures Midlands and your sensational community allotment space, where we were able to meet in a Covid-19 friendly way and learn heritage crafts.

Thank you to Isla Dixon, Hate Crime Officer for Leicestershire Police for showing our care experienced young people that hate comes in many disguises and must be stood up to.

Thank you to the Y Heritage team, Juliet, Amy and James. **Thank you** for supporting Lauren and the other Y Heritage young people.

Finally, **thank you** to Lauren and Casey for giving our project the energy and dynamism it needed, and bringing your knowledge from your lived experiences to guide and shape the project.

Jacob and ZamZam



Taking Hold of Our Heritage

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MILAN
DAD
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