

Growing Up In Care

Do you ever wish you could get rid of your parents? Don't they really annoy you sometimes? Well, I don't really blame anyone who thinks that way. But imagine if you had to grow up without your parents. Would you be or have been able to handle it? Hamida Begum, 14, interviewed a couple of care leavers to find out more about life in foster homes.

Hoz, 21, who has recently left care, had to come to this country from Congo. He says: "because of my ethnic background, I had to get away. When Laurent Desire-Kabila took over from Mobutu Sese Seko as Congo's President those who belonged to the Mungala, Mobutu's ethnic group, were persecuted. Hoz is of Mungala descent himself.



When Hoz was just 16, a man who claimed to be a friend of his father took Hoz travelling along with him. "He made me travel to one country then to another. I was travelling with three different people and out of the three I knew just one. He proposed to help which at that point didn't seem like an option to discuss. So I accepted his help.

Shahinera, 23, who has also now left the care service, was taken away from her parents at the age of 13. She explains how she had been young and naive back then, roughly 10 years ago. "I thought I was going on a holiday or something. At that time my thinking was like a child. As far as I'm concerned there's never really a right time for children to deal with foster care.

After 3 years in care Shahinera went back to live with her parents. Her younger brother and sister also had to go into care but unfortunately they lived separately to Shahinera. When asked if they kept in contact, she replied: "We did but it was really not that often just once in a while or something. We didn't keep in touch so much with my family as well.

Hoz however was an only child. Sadly, his parents and grandmother passed away. His Dad had been in the army, on the subject of his father Hoz says: "I didn't see my Dad that much. If I had to count how many times I've seen my Dad I would say 20 in my whole life.

Foster care is when young people under the age of 18 have stand-in carers as their guardians. This happens as they have been taken away from their biological parents for various reasons. While the child in question is under foster care, one of the following three plans is determined for the child's future: reuniting with the child's birth parents, making the child's foster home into his/her permanent home or adoption and placing the child with another legally permanent family.

Fortunately for Shahinera, she was reunited with her parents after 3 years in care. Yet things weren't that easy for Hoz as he had no family back in Congo: "With my ethnic background it wouldn't really be an option to go back because things aren't that good. He also says how when he first arrived to the UK he was: "dropped in front of the home offices. The person who had brought him to the UK said: "just walk in there and I'll explain the situation and they'll give you help. And with that Hoz was left by himself in a foreign country at 16 years old.

Fostering appears to be quite a positive arrangement, but Hoz and Shahinera tell us about negative experiences. Shahinera: "My younger brothers and sisters. I think they were bullied in their foster care home by their foster brother. The bullying was quite bad for my brother because when he thinks about it, he gets quite emotional. I was bullied, when my foster sister was putting me down, I didn't realise.

Hoz talked about a girl he knew who went through something similar: "Her foster mother was extremely mean to the girl; she wasn't doing anything for her and wasn't buying her anything. When she went out she asked the girl to get out and stay outside the house and she would lock the house. She would come back whenever she wanted to. The girl couldn't explain what was happening because she couldn't speak English. Luckily, the social services were eventually told by someone who knew her language as well as English, this helped to right the situation.

Shahinera shares another bad experience: "My first foster mother wasn't that understanding. She bought stuff for her adopted daughter but nothing for me. I used to lock myself in my room but she never tried to come in and see if I was okay.

It wasn't just the foster residencies which led to problems; it was also the Social Workers: "Sometimes you get the impression that you have to shout to get something," says Hoz. Whilst Shahinera adds: "They take action after the damage is done. Whenever it suits them.

Yet not all Social Workers were bad, Hoz says: "I had a Personal Adviser and she was really good, she was efficient. Once the carpet was dirty, so she asked the manager if the building had a vacuum cleaner. The manager said there was only one which was used by the cleaner who did the corridors and stairs. The rooms are the responsibility of the residents. Two days later she got me money for a vacuum cleaner.

Hoz also experienced conflict with others in care: "I was in a sharing accommodation and one boy used to always use my stuff in the kitchen and leave it dirty. I ignored it at first. One day I said to him, "if you use my stuff can you please clean it?" He got aggressive and he had a knife and I thought that was it for me.

After their own experiences with fostering, both positive and negative, Hoz and Shahinera are both willing to give it a try. Shahinera says: "I wouldn't mind because there are a lot of children who have been abandoned but it's not easy. You need to put a lot of commitment into it. Hoz adds: "there are children in need of a guide and if I have what it takes I will be willing to do it.

About this story

This article was written by Hamida Begum, 14.

Comments

Interesting

This article was very interesting to read.

amy (age 14) from MO, 01 February 2010 15:16

Luv it

Go Hamida! Loved the article. You showed it to me in school init, and now its on the web for the rest of the world to see!

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