

Voices

The shortlisted
entries from the
Voices 2018 creative
writing competition
for children in care
and young care
leavers

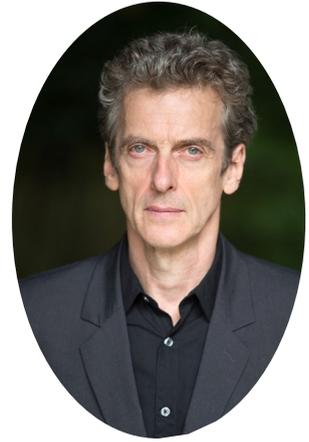
With the support of



*Rosemary and
Bernard Mayes*

A message from Peter Capaldi

I am delighted to be supporting Coram Voice's writing competition 'Voices' for the second year in a row. Voices is dedicated to celebrating the talents of children and young people in and leaving the care system by giving them a platform to express themselves in their own words. It has been wonderful to see so many more young people entering the competition this year and sharing with us a glimpse into who or what makes them proud.



The shortlisted submissions in this book offer a diverse and moving collection of stories. The judges and I were immensely impressed by the quality of writing, and the ability to convey emotions and experiences through the power of the written word. While they vary in their formats, from letters and poems to short stories and raps, they all keep the reader engaged from start to finish.

It has been a privilege to read these shortlisted submissions again. I would like to say a huge thank you to all of those young writers who shared their stories with us.

A big thank you to...

Peter Flavel, Coutts Chief Executive for kindly donating the use of this wonderful event space, and Gerri Carr, Sarah Moriarty and the Coutts Charity Committee for helping to make it happen. Thank you also to Legal & General and The Queen's Trust for their support, to Pearson Publishing, Canongate Books Limited, Aitken Alexander Associates Limited, Alex Brown, Sophie Willan, Scoop magazine, Kit de Waal, CoramBAAF and Cathy Glass for their generous prize donations, and to Rosemary and Bernard Mayes for kindly supporting our Primary School category.

A big thank you to our brilliant judges who gave up their time to support our competition and inspire our young writers; Jenny Molloy, Dreadlockalien, Ashley John-Baptiste, Lucy Spraggan, Lisa Cherry, Mr Gee, Jackie Long and Lola Jaye, as well as our wonderful host Peter Capaldi for hosting Voices for the second year in a row. Thank you to all of our shortlisters and to all of the wonderful charities, virtual heads, local authorities and youth centres for sharing Voices with the young people they work with. Thank you to colleagues across the Coram Group who have helped with the competition, especially Sasha Khan, Emma Lamberton, Ellie Meakin and Luisa Corricelli for making sure the competition reached as many people as possible and helping to organise the awards.

Most of all, a huge well done and thank you to all the young writers who entered Voices 2018. We were really impressed by your creativity and talent, and we are so grateful that you decided to share your writing with us. We are proud of all of you and proud to be able to share your voices through the competition and beyond.

- Linda Briheim-Crookall, Head of Policy and Practice Development at Coram Voice



Primary School Category

- To My Sister! by Aminah, page 5
- Art of My Heart by Adam, page 5
- Proud of Being Proud by Chael's, page 6
- I Am Proud Of... by Lewis, page 7
- PROUD by Connor, page 8
- What Makes Me Proud by Liam, page 9

Lower Secondary School Category

- Who Makes Me Proud by Karis, page 11
- Shout it Loud, it's Time to Find PROUD by Charlotte, page 12
- Ro to the Rescue by Allasandro, page 14
- Feeling Proud by Tamzin, page 15
- Every Day in Every Way by Teoni, page 16

Upper Secondary School Category

- Proud by Emma, page 19
- Never Said Enough by Charde, page 20
- This is Me... by Elisha, page 21
- Every Single Day by Ronnie, page 22
- Kindest Boy in the Class by Lyndsey, page 24
- A Letter to Myself by Jade, page 25

Care Leaver Category

- Pridary by Tychique, page 27
- Sincerely, From an Older You, by Louise, page 28
- Let Me Just Check That With Mike by Nathan, page 30
- What Deserves the Picture of my Pride by Asmara, page 32
- Forced to Grow by Abbey, page 33
- Proud by Georgia, page 34

*Within the entries names and locations have been changed

The graphic features a bright green background. In the upper right, there is a large orange circle. In the lower right, there is a large circle with diagonal purple and green stripes. A large white circle is centered on the page, containing the text.

**Primary School
Category**

To My Sister!

I am proud of you,
for making it this far.
I care about you so much,
you're a superstar!

Despite the real world
you have to face,
I know for a fact,
you're not a disgrace!

However, there's people that tease.
You can take it, with ease!
No one cares about what people say,
You know what you do,
just shove em' away!

Art of My Heart

If you could see,
what I see when I pick up my pens,
The pictures that I paint
and the hours that I can spend.

The red, the orange,
the pink and the blue,
swirling round and round,

Then passing through my fingers
and it's there,
my thoughts are found.

I use bright orange
when things look great,
Just like rays of sunshine
on a summers day.

Red can be my anger,
when I am feeling hurt,
Just like a fire inside me,
this colour really works.
Blue is when I am feeling down,
when I find it hard to say,

You're amazing
in every way possible,
Don't let anyone block your
path,
you're unstoppable!

For what you live for,
for what you do,
I'm always by your side,
I love you.

Judge's comments:

"This is a poem with meaning and purpose well beyond a competition. Twelve lines of poetry that are so supportive, encouraging and inspiring that we felt proud for you both"



**Aminah,
aged 11,
1st place**



Just exactly what has gone
wrong
and make it go away.
Things are looking rosy
when I use my pink pen,
It feels like all the red
has gone
and things feel good again.

If I mix all the colours
and see the different shades,
I guess that's how
I would paint myself
and put me on display.

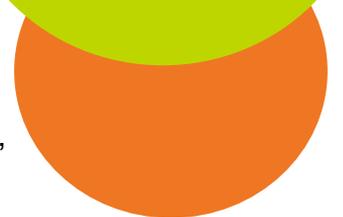
I am proud of all my art,
I want everyone to see,
Just how much
my pictures and colours mean to

Judge's comments:

"Good poets paint pictures with words and this poem does that, and it invites the reader to see things from his point of view"



**Adam,
aged 10,
2nd place**



Proud of Being Proud

I'm proud of my achievements
I'm proud of my life,
I'm proud of my family
And overcoming strife.

Helping my little brother-
It's not easy being a sister
Manipulating his choices
To make him a good mister.

My auntie helps my brother and me
She flourishes us with love,
I don't know what I'd do without her
A best friend like a turtle dove!

I'm proud of my achievements
I'm proud of my life,
I'm proud of my family
And overcoming strife.

Starting a new journey
Within a wonderful school,
I didn't know it'd be this easy
To find friends so charming and cool.

I was elated but scared -
I felt butterflies on my first day,
I didn't know what to do
Or what I had to say.

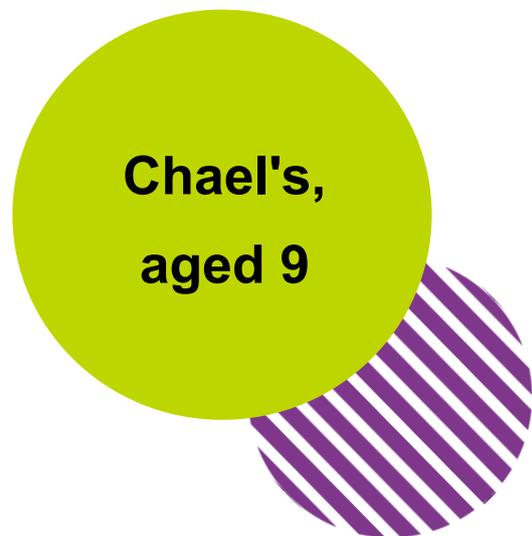
I made lots of best friends
Really, really quick,
They've been ever so kind
School is absolutely SICK!

I'm proud of my achievements
I'm proud of my life,
I'm proud of my family
And overcoming strife.

Life doesn't stop there
It's reeling and fun,
I enjoy doing gymnastics and dance
The fun has just begun.

Entering competitions
A little bit like this,
I always try my best
Never give anything amiss.

I'm proud of my achievements
I'm proud of my life,
I'm proud of my family
And overcoming strife.



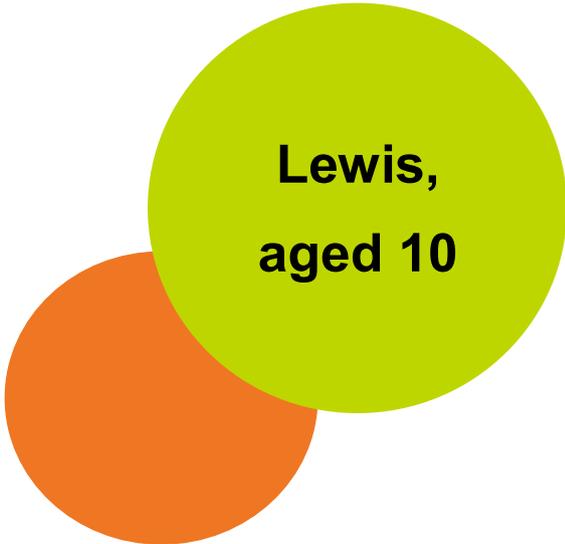
I Am Proud Of...

I am proud of myself because of my determination and of all the challenges of my life that I have faced and conquered. I am also proud of my first carer Shona* the best, patient Mum that I could have relied on or for a shoulder that I could cry on. She would help me with my difficult feelings and obviously my difficult life. I am very proud of my real Mum that started as an alcoholic that could not be bothered to do work, but now she works and is paid. She has stopped drinking a lot. Hopefully, maybe one day I could meet her but she is the main part of this story.

I am proud that I can read with expression, write with skill, spell impeccably and the most important thing of all, I can talk loudly. I am proud that I can ride a bike and sing properly, dance even. I am proud that I have emotions that I can feel and now, can control. I am proud of my schoolwork and my relationships with my friends, they're quite strong as well. I am most proud of my literacy and my maths.

I am proud that I will be going to Povia Green* as my Secondary school and that I have made it in. I am proud of my wellbeing. I am proud of people that cared for me. I am proud of the food they provided, the beds and the pillows and mostly the love they showed me.

I am proud of what job they wanted to get to, be carers for children. I am proud of everything in life that I have either thought about been happy about, pleased, overcome, and loved. I'm proud my family, my foster families, my school, my teachers, my TA's, the people that have helped me to talk about my feeling like, Tom*, Lily*, Molly*, Samuel*, Dennis* and everyone else.



**Lewis,
aged 10**

PROUD

My family do make me PROUD,
but I will always know that they love me
to the highest cloud.

My family makes proud,
even to this day,
they're all like a royal crown,
shining in their own way.

With my family
they never make me sad,
with them being around,
I never feel bad.

My family do different things
that should make them feel proud,
My brother plays football
The other one is a gamer.

My dad is a keeper
While my mum's like a royal helper
They are like a silver crystal,
shining in the moonlight,
I'm always thinking about them,
even in the night.

My family still makes me proud,
they throw the bad away,
and with their determination
they could make a lion stay.

They might not have been my birth family
but I love them very much,
with their love and their ways
my heart they touch.

My family do make me PROUD,
but I will always know
that they love me
to the highest cloud.

My mum is tall and blonde,
she is very thoughtful and strong,

she has a loving heart
that could make the joker care for art.
My dad is small
and his hair is brown,
he would definitely suit
the king's royal crown,
so he should really take a bow.

My older brother plays football,
he really is quite tall, he is kind
and has short, curly, brown hair,
and if he left I would miss his care.

My other brother
is a cunning gamer,
and he has some skills like Neymar,
he is thoughtful and kind,
the kind of brother
you would like to find.
I do love them very much
and I know that they love me.
They are kind and loving
and have a heart full
of feelings inside them.

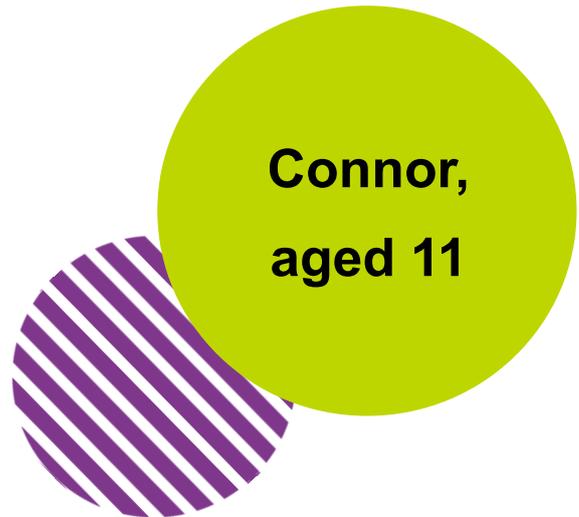
They are strong
and determined to make lives great,
that is a really good trait.

I wish that I could be with them
all my life.
They are the best
and sometimes the worst
in the ups and downs
in family life,
but they always end happy

They put themselves out for me
and I wish that I could
pay them back somehow,
I will think of a way by being
the best I can be every single day.

I would like to end this poem on high,
maybe on a bridge or in the sky,
where I say it is not what matters all I want to
say is that whoever you are
you will always make someone proud.

We may not be made
of the same blood
and didn't started life all together,
and some people may think of us as odd,
but it's the love and support
that makes us family
and for that I feel proud.



**Connor,
aged 11**

What Makes Me Proud

Willing to accept my situation
Happy to help other children like me
Adapting well to my new family
Thankful for Nina* and Charlie* and their love

Managing at school (free reader now, yay!)
Asking for help when I'm struggling to cope
Kind to other people
Escalated academic levels
Sibling jealousy has gone

Managing contact with my family
Every day I think of how well I've improved my ways

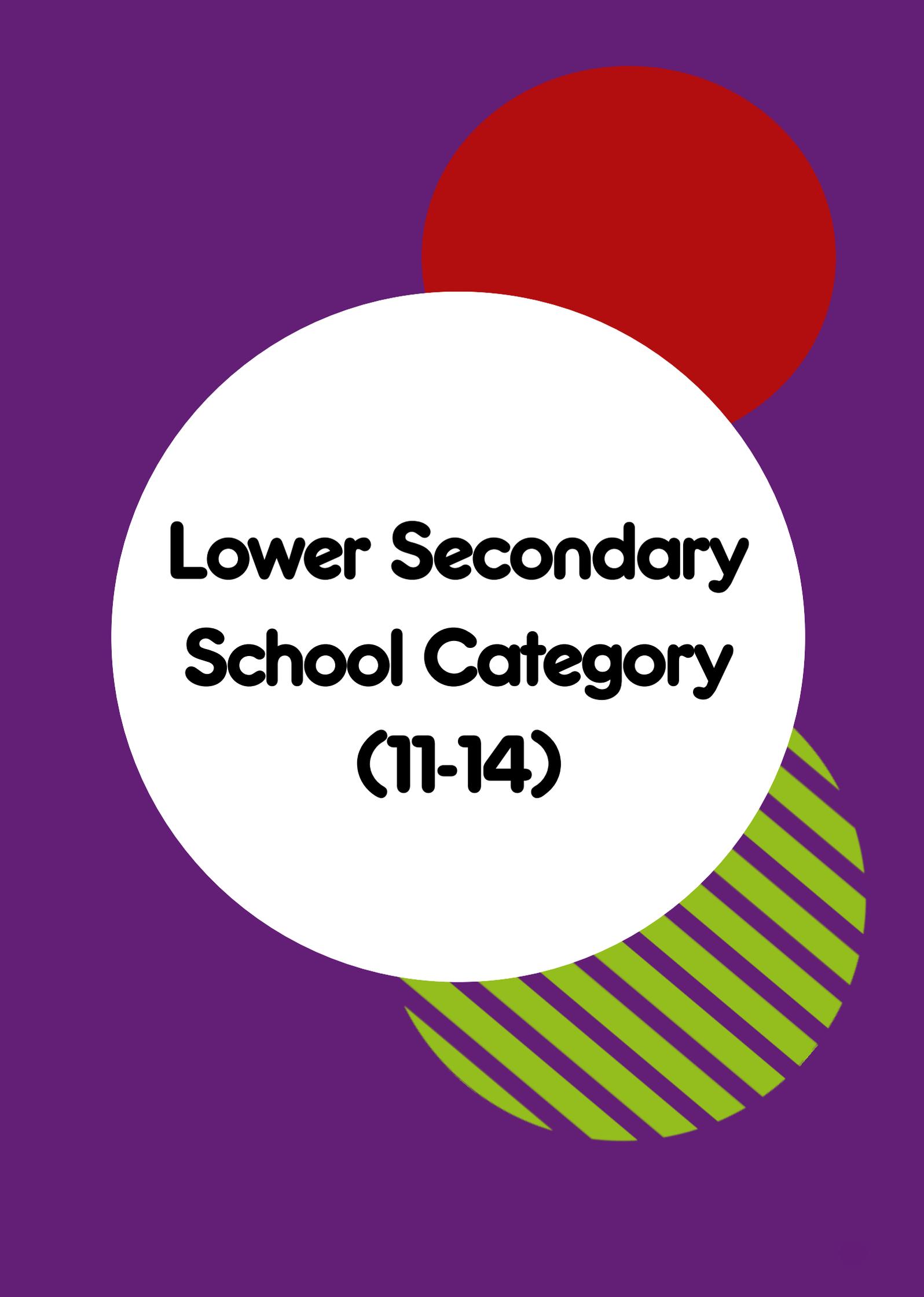
Proud of how much I've matured
Remember how much I've improved in school
Offering help around our home
Understanding that I'm not alone
Developed into a nice young man.

Judge's comments:

"We liked the acrostic form and the way the writer acknowledges self-improvement. A nice poem from a nice young man – well done!"



**Liam,
aged 10,
3rd place**



**Lower Secondary
School Category
(11-14)**

Who Makes Me Proud

When I moved it was overwhelming
I was scared and upset at first,
but I soon realised
there was nothing to fear
I soon made myself at home here
I made friends
and met your lovely family,
they are now mine too
I don't know what my life
would have turned out like
if I hadn't of met you.

If I want something doing
or need help,
I know you will always be there
No matter how I may be annoying,
or say I don't care,
I know you will always be there
As many times as I have chocolate,
you know I will never share,
yet I know you will always be there.

When I kick and scream
and yell I want to leave,
I know you still love me,
but most of all I know
you will always be there
we have cats and dogs,
guinea pigs and fish
best of all,
a horse was my biggest wish
It came true,
thanks to you.

Lots of lessons
has made me pro,
I plait my horses mane and tail
and ride her even more,
something I would never have learnt
if I hadn't of met you
I never miss school,
and you make me work hard

at times you get on my nerves,
to get things done,
watching my every move,
Checking my skirt is not too short,
that boys are treating me well,
Sometimes I feel like I'm living in hell.

But I know why you do it,
and that's because you care,
You want the best for me
and love me unconditionally.

My foster mum
you always let me know
you are proud of me
You are the person
who makes me proud of you
And I know you will always be there.



**Karis,
aged 14,
2nd place**

Judge's comments:

"This poem shows the realistic side of fostering, including the ups and the downs. This allowed each verse to come across as very authentic. In just a few words, the writer is able to challenge the reader's point of view whilst allowing us a glimpse into their world. Delightful!"



Shout it Loud, it's Time to Find PROUD

Now life has dealt me
a different hand,
one I never asked for
or would have planned,
I grew up on
the receiving end from evil acts,
forced into a world of lying pacts.

Nothing and no one
to be proud of there,
surviving each day
with words of the usual swear.

I was discredited by those losers,
all just a load of bruising boozers,
It hasn't been easy no simple ride,
but now a real mum and dad ALWAYS
there to guide.

Hey they make me PROUD
yes it's them close to me,
they willingly entered
my world of the beastly.

They listen they react
my side they are by,
they are my forever family my true ally.
They talk of how they listened
to God's calling voice,
leaving their past lives for ME
they made that choice.

I still can't believe it why me,
so thankful they had heard so clear
so often my inner plea.
But they did and they work
tirelessly night and day,
what makes me so PROUD
is they never sway.

Whatever I do
however I am
they are there so real,
they are my unbendable steel.
I eat now I sleep in peace,
even those nightmares
have begun to decrease.

They have invited me into
a loving caring home,
I have no need to consider escaping
or trying to roam.

I'm PROUD of their strength their fortitude,
to take not just me
but my sister and brother brood.
So PROUD too I
have inherited a big sis and bro,
what they have achieved
makes me want to glow.

Our big sis lives in London
a fashion icon for real,
PROUD I feel as she is the real deal.
PROUD of our big bro
out there in the States,
made a life with a wife a writer he creates.

Now that's what real parents do
you see for their offspring,
give confidence to lift upspring.
Our forever parents brought
the word PROUD to our hearts,
not the dread of life in fits and starts.

I'm PROUD how we all laugh
and joke around,
it's great to see smiles
instead of lines and frowns.

What's brilliant about composing
this RAP for you,
is it's made me aware
that I'm PROUD of me too.
You see I made it out
from the dark to the light,
away now and forever
clear of the affright.

PROUDNESS I feel has a healing hand,
as it grows within
strike up the band.
Feeling PROUD has made me stronger
opened up my way ahead,
putting past wrongs down there
with the dead.
Indebted mum and dad repay I hope so,
to make you always PROUD
of me as I grow.
But let's never forget
there's children still in despair,
who's there for them to bring
PROUDNESS and CARE.



**Charlotte,
aged 13,
1st place**

Judge's comments:

"This rap matches the theme beautifully whilst exploring it in such an interesting way. The journey begins quite bleak then changes when the reader begins to feel more and more uplifted with each verse - so much so, you can almost see the stars and sparkles leaping out of the page!"



Ro to the Rescue

One Saturday whilst walking to the shop I came across a lady who was struggling with her shopping, it was very cold, snowy and icy. I offered to help carry her heavy bags, she was very grateful and wrote to my headmaster at school, he was very proud of how well I'd represented the school. She also sent a thank you card and £5. It felt very good to help her and make my school and all my family proud of me so I thought I would tell my story through a poem.

My name is Allasandro
but people call me Ro,
I'm 13 and I like to put on a show,
This is what happened
a few Saturdays ago,
I came across an elderly lady
who was walking real slow,
She was slipping and sliding
on the icy snow,
I removed my hood
approached her and stood
and offered to do something good,

"Please may I help carry your shopping home
it's very slippy and you're all alone".

"Oh yes please that's very kind
I was worried I'd slip on my behind"
so I carried her shopping up the street
whilst we struggled to stay on our feet.
Back at school my name was called,
"oh what have a done now" I bawled

I heard the words
"I'm so very proud"
right in front of an eager crowd.
My headmaster had received a letter of gratitude,
this put me in such a good mood.
Back at home the celebration begun,
and all because of what I had done.
Everyone is proud of the young man I've become.

Judge's comments:

"The voice in this piece is strong and uplifting. The theme of self-love is an important and refreshing one, and the humanity and humility lifted off the page beautifully. We could picture the writer considering hard what to say and how to say it. A smashing piece!"



**Allasandro,
aged 13,
3rd place**

Feeling Proud

When I am sitting alone in a room, a small room, like my bedroom, it can feel like the walls are closing in on me. I feel stressed.

When my sister hurts herself, I feel stressed and sad and scared. When I feel like this I listen to music and put my colourful lights on.

I am proud that I can help myself to feel better.
If I can do something that I think I can't do, I feel proud.
If I am not as confused as I think I am going to be, I feel proud.
Like when I understand a question in Science.

If I struggle but keep going, then I feel proud.
Sometimes, if I finish questions before other people,
I can help them and we both feel proud.

When I feel proud,
my body tingles,
my shoulders feel light,
the pressure drops and, although I am not,
I feel tall and I feel free.

I am on top of the world and no one can judge me for the person I want to be.
I can have a dream and I can stand out from the crowd.

I can be proud.



Every Day in Every Way

I'm wide awake,
between you and me,
My life shines like the open sea,
Nothing can tear us away,
As much as I always pray,
I love the sun,
and I love the sea,
Just like I love you and me.

The stars glitter bright throughout the night,
Before anyone starts to have a fight,
As the angels keep an eye,
You'll be munching on a big mince pie.
All of your worries can disappear,
With a little help by all of your peers.

The ocean is a world of madness,
But there is also a lot of sadness.
Always have manners to everybody you know,
even people who live on the street,
If you do you might get lots of goodies and treats.
Imagine you're a snowflake daintily drifting down from the clouds,
All the things you do you could be very proud.

I am happy to say that I am proud of my mummy
because she does all of this:
My Mum is a tear drier,
and an awesome treat buyer,
And she's a money lender
and a chief defender.
Also however wild she is,
she loves her child,
Whatever she does to make me proud,
Just picture me and mum in a great big fluffy cloud.

I am sort of proud of my Dad,
But sometimes he makes me very sad.
But even though he is not bothering,
At least I've got my mum,
who can be very mothering.

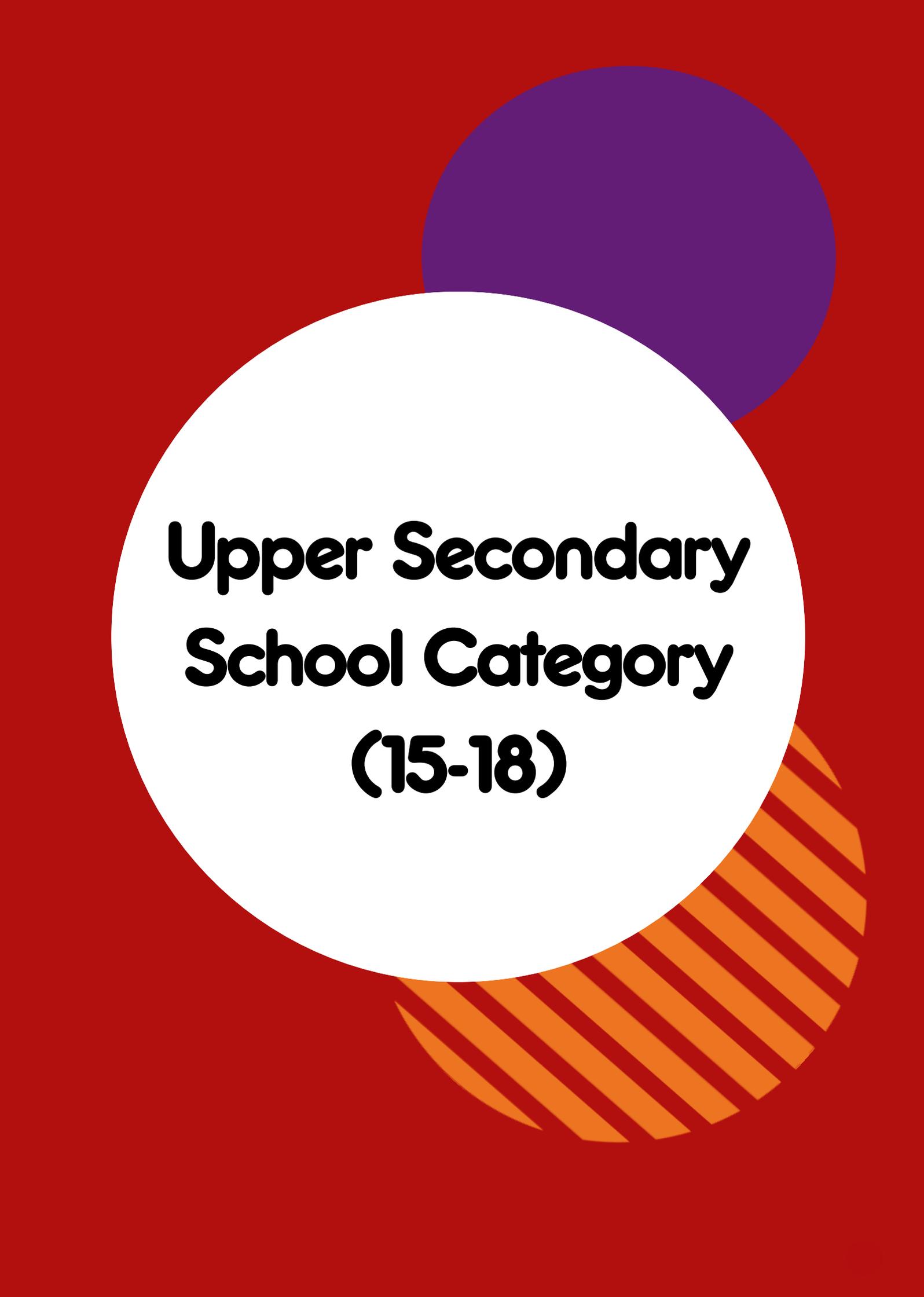
I am very proud of my sisters
for going through a situation like this,
But there are things that I always miss.

Clarice* is a beast that I am proud of,
Because she is a great foster niece.
Even though I don't see my sister Holly*,
I've still got a friend like her called Molly*,
I am proud of myself for coping for six to seven
Years in a foster home,
at the age of eleven.

Everyone that I care about are all,
a Best Carer,
And a great love sharer.
I am now in Foster care
and all though my childhood,
I've learned what a child should.



**Teoni,
aged 11**



**Upper Secondary
School Category
(15-18)**

Proud



**Emma,
aged 15**

Throughout your life many people, many influences (both negative and motivational), will pass through, each teaching you a valuable lesson in life. The older you get, the more you appreciate the small circle of people that you embed yourself within. Their existence becomes more significant as each day goes by and you come to be more thankful and proud for all that they do for you when in need of support.

From being a little girl people have always told me that everybody deserves a chance at life... and coming into care was my chance. My carers, both past and present, have helped me to form into a mature young lady. They have taught me the meaning of life and that your biggest fan will always be yourself. They motivate me to do well in life and often remind me that “we are only visitors to this planet”. This reaches out to me on a special level and makes me determined to make a difference in the world and to encourage others to do the same.

Before coming into care, I was a totally different person. I was shy, quiet and not the least bit confident in myself and my capabilities. Now though, I am outgoing, determined and a person that I feel proud to be. The resilience I have gained from the consistent support from people around me is astonishing. I couldn't be more grateful. When I think of pride, the first person I think of is my beautiful mother.

The idea that such a wonderful woman could lose her life unexpectedly in the blink of an eye, makes me appreciate the existence of those closest to me. As each day passes, her once striking presence becomes more of a distant memory and less of a comfort. However, despite the fact she is no longer here to watch me flourish, I know that deep down she sees my every move and watches me gracefully with those stunning eyes, connecting with my heart in a way which nobody else ever could. She motivates me. She makes me proud.

Finally, one of the most influential groups of people involved in my growth are my wonderful friends. Each and every one feels more like a sister every day and supports me with my struggles, doubts and problems unflinching. Not only do they help me constantly but this is a shared bond. Together as a whole we ignite each other's dreams and encourage each other to achieve our goals. I am so proud of them all- I probably wouldn't be here today without them.

As much as I know this is neither a story, nor a poem or a rap or even song lyrics... it is the truth and the truth is more meaningful to me than any story I could ever write. These people make me who I am and I couldn't be more appreciative.

Never Said Enough

She wants to die
She's calling death and this is her third try
She's ready to say goodbye
Her only thought is the pain inside

She's desperate now,
sitting on the hospital bed
she starts to cry
She's waiting for angel wings to grow
so she can fly,
fly to the place above

Where she's no longer haunted by life
She'll be watching over us from the sky
She doesn't want anyone
to hurt as she floats up high
"I'm okay" she whispers,
the same repeated lie
Psychiatrists demand
she have a hospital bed
on suicide watch for the night
So there it is again,
another failed attempt
to escape her pain filled life

You see she wants to do well,
wants to thrive
But pain is never far behind
Sometimes she'd look up
and wish to be a bird
floating through the sky

Or get lost in a fantasy life
that she's no choice but to admire
With the solid belief
her pain is self inflicted,
just like her scarred wrist
To be with her siblings
is her one ignored wish

But since they stole her family,
she's been unable to experience happiness

This pattern seems to be the one
professionals and authorities always miss

Even as she speaks to her therapist
As she talks about memories of her siblings
they are blind to see the small smile
tugging on the corners of her lips
She thinks about the day her siblings were
dragged away
as she watches her arm and the new blood
that drips

Then the thought of losing them for good
making her stomach do flips
She comes out of her daze,
rinsing the blood from her arm
telling herself to get a grip
She's angry and hurt
I mean she could write you an endless list
Her future seems so far
she's unable to see it
because of all the mist
In her heart there's this hole this abyss

But she's made it this far
with a smile on her face
Sister, I know life
has been one big confusing maze
But I'm proud of you in everyway
Your constant smile
admirable even through moments of pain

You're struggling to cope
but you'll be okay
You have four siblings
wanting to be just like you
because you're so brave
You don't let anyone see you're suffering
and it's insane

Helping everyone you know with their
struggles ignoring your own

Always there as a shoulder to cry on
even if it goes in vain
You take the back seat feeling so alone
Trying to make sure
you're there for everyone you know

You carry more love
than anyone could ever know
So much kindness in your heart

Judge's comments:

"The storytelling is superb - it is a wrenching, heart-breaking piece but the intensity of pride and love for their sister spoke to us with every line"



This is Me...

I was the child with the past
The past that trumped them all
I moved houses, got abused
screwed about felt like a fool

Seven primaries in my life
Yeah I barely learnt a thing
I didn't even know the time
And adding was the worst

Then high school came around
Acted like I was so tough
But behind the scenes
I was just a bluff
Foster home to foster home

Revision down the drain
Exams around the corner
Didn't even learn a thing
But an angel came to me

Fixed my focus
Gave me luck
Got me onto the right path

letting the love just flow
But let down and betrayed so many times
it's just blow after blow
I've let you down too
and that you don't even show
But I love you
And I don't say it enough
But I'm proud of you Sis
I'm proud of you

A large red circle is positioned to the right of the poem 'letting the love just flow'. It contains the text 'Charde, aged 16, 1st place' in white. A purple circle is partially visible behind it.

Then the day had finally come
I made it to the finish line
With college up ahead

And on the day I stepped inside
Felt like the heavens opened up
Cause life was looking up for me
I'm finally where I want to be
I'm proud of who I've become

This is me

A large red circle is positioned to the right of the poem 'This is me'. It contains the text 'Elisha, aged 16' in white. An orange and white striped circle is partially visible behind it.

Every Single Day

What a world

What a wild and wondrous world
A world where seven billion people
Go about their business
Every single day

And even when it feels
like the days get longer and harder
Even when it feels exhausting to exist
Even when it feels like every day
is a vicious cycle
Of Earth-shattering misfortunes and scandals
Designed to slowly but surely
make you lose faith
And wander
“What the hell is all this for?”
Seven billion people
Just keep on going
Every single day

Even though in the grand scheme of things
In the big picture of the universe
They're all the size of ants
Even though in the future
None of their accomplishments
will be remembered
And the word “human”
won't mean anything
Because there won't be anyone left
to give it meaning
Seven billion people
Just keep on going
Every single day

And when everything seems
to be crumbling around them
When their mothers, fathers,
sisters, brothers, lovers die
And their heart keeps beating
but their soul travels
with their dearly departed

To the deep dark unknown of
what comes next
Seven billion people
Just keep on going
Every single day

Because after terrorism, tornados,
total terror,
and trying times
A year of assault, discrimination, judgement
And crisis after crisis after crisis
Of oppression, fear, and violence
Seven billion people
Refuse to give up
Every single day

And every single day
Seven billion people wake up
Ready to fight the fight and damn it,
to win the fight
Ready to make this wild, wondrous world
The brilliant and beautiful place it is
Because it may be small in the big picture
But their little Earth is their everything
And what's the point of all this
if they can't help out just a tiny little bit
In their own tiny little way
Every single day

So since the fight gives them a challenge
Since they know they can make the world
better for their children
Since they don't know what tomorrow holds
But they know they have right now
and right now is all they need
Since all of them
Every single last one
From the youngest baby to the oldest man
Has a seed of brilliance inside them
That with some light in their life

And blossom into a tree
Of something revolutionary
Seven billion people
Fight to make a difference
Every single day

And especially after a crisis
Especially when they see an opportunity
To help somebody else
Even though they might not know
who they're helping
Because "human" means so much more than
flesh and internal organs
Seven billion people
Fight for each other
Every single day

And after a year of support,
standing strong,
and step by step improving the worlds
A year of love, hope, unity
And smile after smile after smile
Of understanding, communication,
and learning
Seven billion people
Make me proud
To be part of this wild, wondrous world
Every single Day



**Ronnie,
aged 15,
2nd place**

Judge's comments:

"We loved the repetition in this piece. From the moment it begins, there's an acknowledgment of the profound contradiction of life - the wonder of the world but also how very tough it can be. Yet throughout, the rhythm of resilience and determination is beaten out by the repetition of the phrase "Every single day." It was inspiring to read and very well-written and well thought out. The writer should indeed be very proud"



kindest Boy in the Class

When I was 3, me and my 5 other siblings got taken into care, suffering from neglect and abuse. The youngest being Tim* at 12 months and the eldest being my only sister at 12 years. "Tim had been terribly neglected as a baby, and taken into foster care at just a few months old." This is how Tim was described in the adoption files. Tim hadn't had a normal start in life. He hadn't had the opportunity to play or move much so ended up being very over weight for his age and experienced things he shouldn't have witnessed or had to go through, he hadn't had the attention a child needs to be able to do simple tasks such as bond with others.



**Lyndsey,
aged 16,
3rd place**

When Tim was 2 he managed to find himself a lovely (at least that's what we thought) adoptive family, a young couple from Sunderland*. Everything was going so well, they bonded with him straight away and had it all sorted for him to move in with them; the mum had had fertility problems and thought that Tim was the son that she and her husband had been waiting for, 2 weeks later from them meeting Tim it suddenly dawned on Hannah* that Tim wasn't going to be able to be the son she had always dreamt of as he wasn't her biological son. So after 2.5 weeks she was diagnosed with post adoption/natal depression and made the very hard decision of returning him to foster care. Where he was placed with another couple and their daughter. After not very long they decided to adopt Tim at the age of 2.5 years.

As you might imagine after all this moving about Tim was very traumatised and was very far behind on his developing. Now Tim is age 13 and I couldn't be a prouder sister. When Tim was little he attended speech and literacy therapy as he still hadn't started speaking at age 3. I have yearly letters from Tim's adoptive parents and am always happy to hear he is doing really well as has caught up with most of his class mates in his learning and is already thinking about going to university when he is older. I haven't seen Tim since he was 2 as his parents feel it is best for him to be able to settle in properly before he sees his siblings. Although I really wish I could see him I respect their decision. My most vivid memories of him were that when he was sad or scared he would roll into a ball like a hedgehog or when he was happy he would just bob around.

The reason I am so proud of my little brother is although he has had a very stressful and traumatic life (by the age of 3 going to 4 different homes) he has turned into such a handsome young man and has made the most of his happy times at his adoptive home. Tim has recently been awarded "kindest boy in class" which I think is amazing! I am so proud to have such a strong, handsome young man as my brother and I can't wait to see him!

Judge's comments:

"This is a beautiful, vivid story, which initially reads a little as you imagine a report from a social worker to read, but then bursts with pride as the writer speaks about how well their brother is doing"



A Letter to Myself...

Dear Jade,



Jade,
aged 17

You're probably wondering why you wrote yourself a letter but in 2 years time it will mean something worthwhile to you or even help you through those hard moments in your future life. You went through the struggle at 13 trying to fend for yourself. You had to survive on your own with no father or mother figure supporting you. Your nights and days were spent selling drugs just to get money, so you could eat, just to put clothes on your back.

At 15, you searched for some love and attention and met your first ever love and your first ever regret. Mike* was the person that made you feel safe, who held you through the pain and nurtured you throughout everything even when it wasn't his job to. He was there through the abortion, through the school and family problems... you just didn't know the person you thought you was in love with would ever change on you.

The death of your friend Thomas*, a murder committed by Mike & his friend, scarred your life. How could the love of your life brutally stab someone in front of you? Leaving you with all the consequences of being accused of something you were never involved in. Your life entered hell, you had no friends, everyone was after you, threatening to kill you, you got pulled away from your family to live in Bristol*, you lost belief in yourself, wishing on yourself that it should have been you dead instead of Tom, you were at your very lowest when....

Moving to Brighton* changed your life. Brighton made you understand that God gave you a second chance, God wanted you to open your eyes and realise this is the time to change. You spent a year and half growing and building a better you with all the support of your carers, your new friends and just living in an environment that allowed you to work hard and strive for better things.

And now I can say...

I am proud of what you have achieved.

I am proud of your dreams, aspirations and how determined you are to make it.

I am proud that right now you are 17, living on your own, being independent, going to work and college, doing YouTube, learning how to drive, setting yourself goals, going to the gym and saving your pennies to live YOUR best life. To live YOUR DREAM.

So, this is it, the last part to your letter.

I hope you know you are a strong girl and you should never give up on yourself no matter how many faults you think you have. I hope you take all the terrible things that have happened to you and use them to help you climb not to allow you to fall. Last thing, don't EVER forget I love you and I am proud to say I am happy to be Jade.



Care Leaver Category

Pridary

Luton Town; the pride of East Anglia.

The sea of glistening and flowing orange fills the stadium and fifteen thousand fans all sing from the hymn sheet but completely out of tune.

Manchester United; the pride of the North of England, this time a sea of flowing and furious red. They too sing from the same hymn sheet just as loud and again gloriously out of tune. This is where the quantity of my pride lies, in the pride of East Anglia and the pride of Manchester. Like having two children they fill me with utter delight.

My pride lies in certain people.

People who I deem very close to me, people who have witnessed the greatest and worse of me.

The same who have been knocked back, rejected, hated, spat on and haunted but get up quickly and constantly.

It's far more easier and quieter to get knocked down and to stay down but to get back up continuous every single ounce of the past and future bravery.

My pride lies in the lives of every child and young person that I have come across, no matter how easy or challenging.

I'm proud of how they matured I hope they keep going long after I have moved on. We both developed each other they developed me and I progressed them.

My pride is in all the youth clubs and education buildings in Luton.

How the professionals go that extra mile to see that gleaming child's smile.

But we have been progressing for years so that's nothing new.

We just highlight the negativity so much but if we stretched out the positivity the light would completely overcome the darkness.

My pride has no limits.



Sincerely, From an Older You

To a younger me,

I don't know when you're reading this or where in life you're currently sat contemplating how tough it is, but I have something to say – you're awesome. I am you and you are me, and if I'm being totally, one hundred per cent honest – I've only just come to grips with that.

You. Are. Awesome.

You'll reach for the stars and will find a home among them; you'll find peace by the ocean and a piece of your heart will long for it daily. You'll achieve far greater things than your mind at the moment can comprehend – you, are awesome.

I know better than anyone how tough your life is; I lived it.

Being the kid that's always different, the kid who doesn't fit in or have a 'home', the kid who lives with neither parent. I know better than anyone how angry life makes you – your voice not being heard, and you just want to scream from the rooftops: "Listen to me!" I get it.

One day, one day soon, people will start to listen to you. Because, you'll achieve something not many of us do. You, my dear, head off to the greatest place on these isles and start your undergrad degree. I started our degree thinking that it was 6% of us who went, recent research has changed that – it's now only 4%. When things are getting you down, just remember you're breaking boundaries and changing the game. I'm proud of you.

Uni is hard, I'm not going to lie, but for the first time in our life we found a home. A base amongst the people of this quaint university town, a family amongst the thriving throng of students and crazy Christians. We finally found a place to call home.

So, even though I am no longer in this place we both end up calling home, I long for it. My heart cries out for it when the world is against us. I may not be there currently but what I'm doing now is something for you to look forward to.

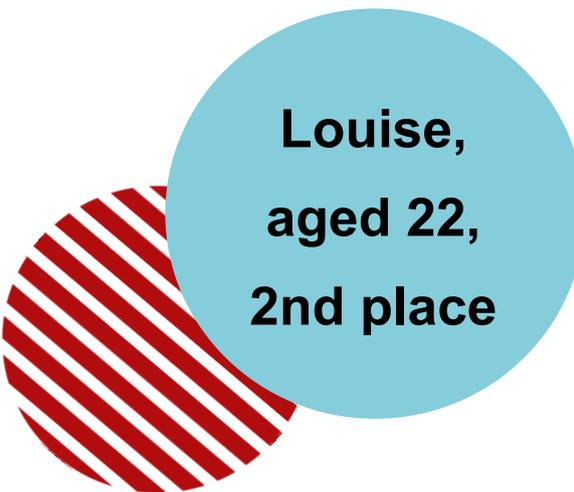
I understand life is challenging, you feel like you stand out like a sore thumb, but I can guarantee you – hand on my heart – one day, you're going to use these experiences in your rewarding yet challenging job. You, are the age I am now, are getting to help kids like us.

Their trials and tribulations, hopes and desires mean something to the person who has been through it all. Out of everyone in the department – you get it. The kids know it, they know that you have something extra, that they can trust you. You have something special.

All this time you're seen your story as baggage, but I can tell you – you're using it do amazing things. Trust me.

One last thing before I go. You're awesome.
Sincerely, an Older You.

PS: I'm proud of the woman you become.



**Louise,
aged 22,
2nd place**

Judge's comments:

"The idea behind this piece is what makes it. A retrospective view can be very emotive and we felt the writer really hit the nail on the head here. The idea of offering support to your former self and commending your past and future achievements is lovely. Great piece"



Our Story

2018 is the 350th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Coram, the man who changed the world for children by creating the first dedicated charity.

Later this year, we will publish *Thomas Coram: Champion for Children*, an illustrated book for children. To pre-book a copy, contact: communications@coram.org.uk

Let Me Just Check That With Mike

The top of the hill is where I wish to stand
as I make my journey and I follow my plan
I feel myself sinking deep at times
but I catch, I latch,
I hold on to what I know which keeps me inline.

Team after team dream after dream;
you see me but you don't listen.
You've got guidelines and cash pots that glisten.
Waiting game is what I play
I sit here silently and stalk my prey
but I remember once again I know my game.
Don't jump too quick,
don't call too soon don't pester me
just wait a few moons,
but it's alright I'm certain she's just going to check with Mike.

I left the pearly gates of family
to what seemed like another rollercoaster of tragedy.
Nervous I was; not nervous I am,
I think all these emotions are part of the plan
it's a whirlwind of pain
but ultimately I have so much more to gain
I don't stand here asking for glory and fame
I merely stand here wishing to state my name
for I am not a statistic, I am not a number
I'm a young person who has the government as my mother.

I stand before you now proud and tall
I've been on this journey for many moons
but who would believe I could be you;
a normal person sitting down in a crowd,
applauding a fine performance
but instead I'm part of something enormous.
A system that isn't all just broken,
but a system that needs repairing
just a system that's got some wear in.
For the sake of the person I wish to become
I will not feel sorry for myself,
I will push and I will motivate myself.

For I'm so proud of whom I have become,
I'm nearly at the top of my potential.
Some would say I'm not
but they're not here to see what's what,
but it's alright let me just check that with Mike.

It's the last day today
the sky is clear
and the sun is so bright,
the sun's out,
my face feels different;
I feel like a ray of light.
A glow comes from my skin
as I stare at the last door
knowing that this is it,
there shall be no more.

My path now is the path of my own
now I'll leave the government high chair
and claim my personal throne,
for I have achieved
so much more on my own
I thank those who helped me
to find me and my destiny
so if there's nothing else to say
I think I've found the best in me,
but that's alright let me just check that with Mike.



**Nathan,
aged 20,
1st place**

Judge's comments:

"This poem is written in a very clever way, and it really spoke to us. The title of the poem used as the punch line of the piece is what we loved most about it. The writer clearly has great capability and ability to project their experiences onto paper. Very well done!"



What Deserves the Picture of my Pride

When I really sat with this thought I couldn't quite narrow down all the things I thought to one person. In my thoughts I often wanted a hero, someone who wouldn't let me down. Who'd turn up to every visit, who'd laugh and smile at everything I did. Someone who was average and yet like a superhero. At first I was convinced I'd be placed with a family who would be perfect and yet normal, rich and yet grateful, fun yet disciplined. I thought my empty would be no more. So when asked who or what are you proud of my knee jerk reaction was to say my foster career, my siblings, my foster family. Although these people are warriors, they have done the unimaginable, they have been consistently present, and yet not perfect. They have been uplifting and yet honest. They have been only what they could be.

So who, what, deserves the picture of my pride?

Strength, smiles and persistence through abuse, pain and neglect. Joy in the face of adversity, contentment with the little. Sparkle in the eyes of the child faced with statistics and assumptions. The firm grasp on destiny, on the future, two hands clasped on their own success. I am most proud, of the inner city black boy bombarded with the pressures of gang culture, of drugs but strives for a degree, a career, of right and not wrong. I am most proud of the young girl who is left with losing loved ones, of the demon of depression, of great expectations from siblings looking up to her, still she rises, she creates businesses, she stands firm and straight, her confidence fills me with pride. The persistent social worker who can't quite grasp that we don't all love Tracy Beaker, who phones every two weeks, to check our accommodation is okay. If we've been able to get our favourite meal.

I am most proud of the mother or father, aunt, uncle or grandfather, who makes it on time to visits. Who converses with the 'staff'. I am most proud of us. I am most proud of what we stand for, what we have fought through. I am beaming with a radiant joy that we are strong, we are resilient, that we are the ones who should be proud, of ourselves. I am most proud of the looked after child, of the care leaver, of the foster carer, of the social worker. I am most proud not that there is much left to work on, but that there are individuals here everyday working, striving, pushing, rising. I am proud.



**Asmara,
aged 21**

Forced to Grow

When I went into foster care things began to change, living with complete strangers made my life so strange. I got a feel for what people are like and why they act the way they do, I got an insight into why peoples lives can be so blue. Soon after more homes, 11 to be exact, was this some Governmental torture act? I was only a kid yet I was pushed aside and it's only now I realise I don't need to hide. I've learnt a lot from the life that I've had, some of it good and some of it bad. I've been brought up by over ten families which has made me sort of detached, I never found a family yet that I've felt I've matched, all are too caught up in their own trauma and I don't want to feel a burden, with all of these voices in my head it's not easy to get a word in.

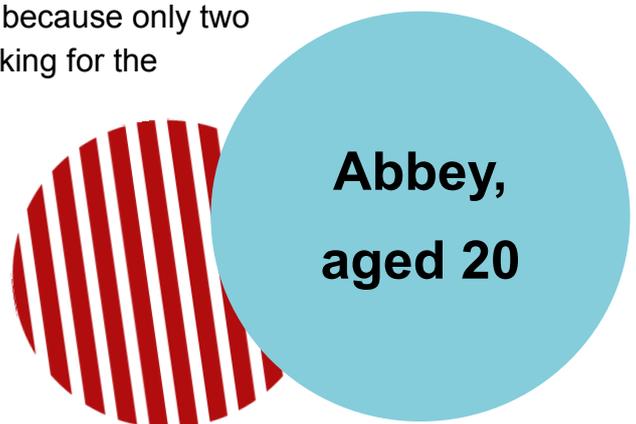
A life so lost in this world of hate, took my Mother from the sadness and finally sealed her fate. The smell of her body filled up the room, her body had lay there for a while, the whole time I stood there I waited for her smile. I had to leave soon after, I couldn't bare the pain and little did I know back then, that it would forever remain.

Two years later my father, that same metal slab, a room that looked experimental and a little like a lab. He too lay there motionless and cold, both my parents I was unable to hold. All I could do it sit and stare, my life has been so God damn unfair. All I wanted was for them to wake up and walk, sit there for hours and just have a talk because I've missed out on that part because I was young, their lives were over before they'd even begun.

Both my parents gone, before I was even eighteen, you wouldn't believe of the horrors I've seen. I've been abused, neglected and left alone. I've been passed around from home to home. To the system I am a puppet as such, what they don't realise is that I know too much. I understand life, I understand death and all from first hand, I've been forced to survive wherever I land.

There's been a lot of trauma in my life that has made me who I am, I lost a part of myself when I lost my Dad and Mam, but without them here I'm fighting to show, that a care experience can force you to grow. I have had support, and I've been pushed back, I've been broken but now I'm back on track. I am thankful for the help that I've had because without people I would be lost, thank you to the people that have helped me despite the emotional cost.

I am proud of where I am, and how far I have come because only two years ago I was motionless and numb. Now I'm working for the council and I'm starting to achieve, its amazing what can be accomplished as soon as you believe. So if ever you're in a situation where you feel there is no light, look at what is happening and remember fight or flight.



Proud

I am proud of the woman I have become,
The mental health disorders
I'm beginning to overcome,
Proud of the demons
who have made me get the help,
Proud of the university
that I attend,
Proud of the way
I handle hard situations,

Proud that we live
in a world with different nations,
Proud that I am now
an influential person,
Proud that I no longer
feel a burden,

Proud to be an auntie
to wonderful children,
Proud they know I'm here to listen,
Proud of the awards
I have achieved,
Proud I am standing
here as we speak,

Mental health in young people,
Can really be bad and lethal,
Proud of the support
I have had over time,
Proud that I am dealing with mine,
Being dyslexic it's hard to write,
But I am able to win this fight,

Proud I am not
one of the statistics turned to crime,
Proud I am one of the few,
Who's starting to handle
Life on my own and trying to get through,
Proud to be as independent as I am,
Proud that I got 12 grades
A-C in my GCSE exams,

I am proud to one day
become a mother,
And not just turn out
to be another number,
Proud of the way
I'm becoming more confident,
Proud that my music
is becoming more consistent,

Proud of the weakness
that have become my strengths,
Proud of the scars
who have become my friends,
Proud that I may not always act my age,
Proud that I am like Peter Pan,
A child at heart that's the way I am,

Proud of the way I stand on stage,
Singing is the way to get rid of my rage,
I am proud I live with anxiety,
Proud of that I am a care kid in society,
Proud that I can change the stigma,
Proud that all my knock backs
have not stopped me,

Proud I am determined
to prove people wrong,
Proud to show people that I am strong,
Proud of the hard journey I've been on,
Proud of being a woman of 21,
I am proud.

Judge's comments:

"We really appreciated the open honesty in this piece of writing. There is a very strong underlying theme of strength and defiance and it's also really great to read a rhyming piece"



**Georgia,
aged 21,
3rd place**

About Coram Voice

Coram Voice exists to enable children and young people to actively participate in shaping their own lives and to hold to account the services that are responsible for their care. We serve children and young people who are vulnerable to harm or exclusion from society, and who rely on the state or its agencies for their rights and wellbeing.

About Voices

Voices is a platform for the creative writing of children in and around the care system. It aims to promote a positive image by showcasing young people's stories and improving understanding of their experiences. In 2018, our theme is 'who or what makes you proud' - enabling children to take pride in themselves.

Voices 2019 will be open for entries late 2018.

The national writing competition was launched in 2016 to mark Coram Voice's 40th anniversary and in honour of our founder, Gwen James, who died in 2015. The competition is open to children in care and care leavers. This year we had four categories: Primary School, Lower Secondary (aged 11-14), Upper Secondary (aged 15-18) and Care Leaver.

Always Heard

Always Heard is the national advocacy safety net and advice service for children and young people in care, leaving care or needing help from Children's Services.

We are independent and here just for you. We will give you advice about your rights and help you to get in touch with your local advocacy services.

We will give you emergency advocacy support if your local advocacy service says it cannot help you.

Freephone: 0808 800 5792

Email: help@coramvoice.org.uk

Text and WhatsApp: 07758670369

Website: www.coramvoice.org.uk/alwaysheard



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Voices

coram
Voice 
getting young voices heard

With the support of



*Rosemary and
Bernard Mayes*

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