



Shortlisted Entries from Voices 2020:
The Creative Writing Competition for
Children in Care and Care Leavers

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With a Big Thank You to...

Cadence Innova for being this year's Headline Sponsor of the Voices Awards and sponsoring the Primary Category. The organisation also sponsored the Voices Awards last year and are committed supporters of Coram Voice, helping the team with the creation of the AdvoCat advocacy service, and pro-bono consultancy support for the Bright Spots Programme to highlight what matters most for children and young people in care. Staff have been busy fundraising to support Coram's work as well.

Club Peloton for sponsoring the Care Leavers Category and getting involved with judging entries in the initial stages. Club Peloton are a valuable partner for Coram and have supported the charity's work for over eight years. This is their first time sponsoring the Voices Awards and we are delighted to have their generous support.

Nick and Katie Searl for sponsoring the Voices Awards for the second year running, specifically supporting the Upper Secondary Category this year. Nick Searl is the Chair of Trustees for Club Peloton, and has supported Coram's work with children and young people for many years.

Rosemary and Bernard Mayes for their sustained support of the competition over the past five years.

Prontaprints & Persephone Books for their generous prize donations.

Peter Capaldi, for hosting the competition and providing ongoing support.

Lauren Child, Piers Torday, Abi Elphinstone, Mr Gee, Christel Dee, Dawn Foster, Paolo Hewitt and Ric Flo for being our amazing competition judges.

Olivia, Steven, Louise and Lauren for assisting the competition as our fantastic young judges.

Thank you to all the **shortlisters** who took the time to read through so many entries. Thank you to all the **charities, virtual heads, local authorities, social workers and youth groups** for sharing information about Voices and encouraging young people to find their voice. Thank you to colleagues across the **Coram** group who have helped with running and promoting the competition.

A Message From Voices

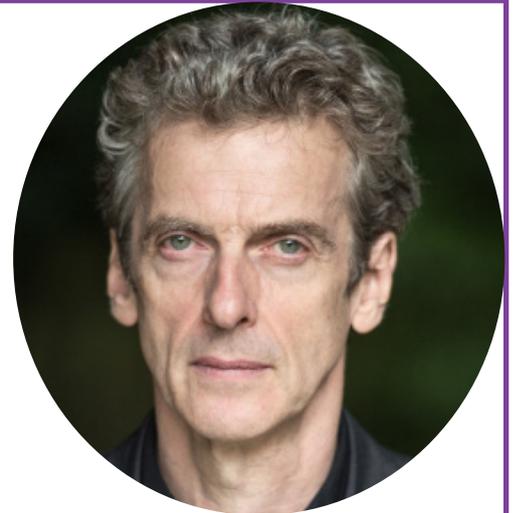
From Peter Capaldi...

I am delighted once more, to be a part of Voices, Coram Voice's annual creative writing competition, now entering its fifth year.

I have been a supporter of Voices since 2017 and I am always impressed with the talent of all the young people involved. It is an honour to be a part of this competition, which provides a platform for care-experienced young people to tell their stories and be heard.

The theme for Voices 2020 is 'Dreams'. The shortlisted entries in this book provide insight into having dreams, fulfilling your dreams, or daring to dream in spite of it all. It is a privilege to glimpse so many young people's hopes for the future. I am inspired by the courage and determination that so many of them show in their aim to improve the care system and the world they live in.

Both the judges and I were knocked out by the quality of the creative writing this year. Thank you to all the young people who have shared their dreams with us. It has been an absolute pleasure to read the shortlisted entries again this year. A huge well done to you all.



From Brigid Robinson, Managing Director at Coram Voice...

Voices, the only national creative writing competition for care-experienced young people, is now celebrating its fifth year. Started by one of Coram Voice's advocates as a small project for children in care, the competition has grown exponentially. It has been wonderful to read all of the unique and insightful entries from our young people year after year.



A massive thank you is in order for all the young people who took the time to enter Voices 2020. We are immensely grateful that so many children in care and care leavers have shared their dreams and aspirations with us. We are proud to showcase their work and we are proud of every single young person who entered.

Our Judges

Primary Category

Piers Torday is a children's author. His books include *The Last Wild*, *There May Be A Castle* and *The Lost Magician*.

He says: "In these challenging times for both those in care and those who care for them, it is more vital than ever that we hear their voices and what they have to say."



Lauren Child is a children's author and illustrator. She is the creator of the Charlie & Lola, Clarice Bean and Ruby Redfort picture books.

She says: "I am delighted to be a judge in this year's Voices competition and support this wonderful initiative giving young people in care and care leavers a platform to express themselves."



Lower Secondary Category

Abi Elphinstone is a children's author and reading helper for Coram Beanstalk. Her books include *The Unmapped Chronicles*, *Sky Song*, *The Dreamsnatcher* trilogy and *The Snow Dragon*.

She says: "I'm honoured to be a judge for Coram Voice, which celebrates the creative talents of care-experienced young people."



Mr Gee is a poet and presenter. He presented "*Bespoken Word*", "*Rhyme and Reason*" and "*Poetic Justice*" on BBC Radio 4.

He says: "I am very happy to be back again as a judge for the Voices competition that empowers young people in care and allows them to express themselves in such powerful ways."



Our Judges

Upper Secondary Category

Christel Dee is a care-experienced author and Whovian. Her books include *Doctor Who: The Women Who Lived: Amazing Tales for Future Time Lords*.

She says: “As a care-experienced person myself, I know how important it is for children in care and young care leavers to have positive platforms to express themselves. I’m really looking forward to seeing what they create!”



Dawn Foster is a care-experienced journalist and author. She writes for The Guardian and Jacobin Magazine, as well as contributing to the Times Literary Supplement, London Review of Books and The Independent.



Care Leaver Category

Ric Flo is a care-experienced rap artist. He is the creative director of Hip-Hop collective Jungle Brown.

He says: “Having first-hand experience of the care system myself, I am very happy to be a judge on the 2020 Voices competition. I am proud to support young people using the power of creative writing to amplify their voices.”



Paolo Hewitt is a care experienced music journalist and writer. His books include *The Looked After Kid & But We All Shine On*.

He says: “I am so pleased to have been asked to be a judge in the Voices creative writing competition. Having been in care for a lengthy period myself this really is such a great honour.”



Primary Category

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Care Leaver Category

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My Dreams Saved Me, p. 36

We Are the Stuff That Dreams Are Made of, p. 37.

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What Dreams Are Made of, p. 40.

Dreams Can Come True, p. 41.

Many of these entries are about people's lives and some of the content may be upsetting.

Primary Category Age 4-10 Years

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The World in My Imagination

I close my eyes and enter the world in my dreams.

The trees covered in pink, purple and yellow flowers welcome me. I'm safe, far from the dangerous, haunting outside world. I am in my world, the world in my dreams.

Deeper into my fantasy woods I go, thankful for this world, thankful for my world. Finally, I come to a stop. I've arrived at my home. The home where I can think, where I can just be myself. I've got secrets I haven't told anyone, haunting secrets that no one knows, but here in my sleep, I'm free.

To live my life isn't easy, but in my dreams, I can pretend everything is normal. Deep inside I know it's not but sometimes if you pretend things are – life will get better, right?

I stroll across the familiar path towards my thought-shed. It's where I go to think and make decisions. I am once again greeted by the warm, luminous glow of the lavender-smelling candle I had set on my desk...

Wait.

What?

I remember blowing the light out before I returned to the real world. So who...

I rush inside. My lungs fill with toxic fumes and the smoke sting my eyes. I take a few staggering steps backwards. Before me, my home is lit up in flames.

Judges Comments

This was a vivid dream story rich in colour, sensation and detail. Like many real dreams, it combined the surreal (multicoloured trees, fantasy woods) with the shock of waking into the real. In this case, a catastrophe of fire and smoke which transforms the dream into a nightmare with skill.



Laila
age 10

I See You

I see you, you are my dreams you hug my
head real tight,
You wait until the darkest part and come to me
each night.
Flicker into my tired and aching head,
Giving me weird and wonderful story lines that
thread.
They gather speed they dart about in the
deepest corners of my mind,
And that is where they stay buried and
confined.
In this sleepy state I cannot separate reality
from illusions,
Some are so absurd they have to be
delusions.
People come and go some I really do not
know,
And thoughts are triggered, 'What fun it was
to fly just like a crow'.
I've travelled thousands of miles all from the
covers of my bed,
And sailed a stormy sea clinging onto the
masthead.
Swimming with sharks and protecting the
earth with love,
I've even eaten jelly whilst wearing a boxing
glove.
Sinking into the ground to unknown cities,
Living in the past with hippies in the sixties.
Time knows no bounds and falls can bounce
me back up,
I even dream about when I am all grown up.
I flee the chasing dragon but I end up as his
friend,
Hanging from a dangling wire clinging to

the bitter end.

Riding waves in oceans and clearing up the
waste,
Asking help from adults as our world is a
disgrace.
Chatting with the famous dining in their
homes,
Going submarining with a load of garden
gnomes.
Being on a skateboard far in outer space,
Jamming with Rock Legends, hear me on
the BASS.
Chocolate lakes and rivers flowing into
mugs,
Cats discussing Shakespeare and ballet
dancing pugs.
Jumping like a flea a hundred miles high,
Landing on a crusty edge of a pork and egg
pie.
Being bitten by a monster with jagged dirty
teeth,
Or skiing down Mount Everest on a
baguette going off-piste.
Danger fills my veins and pumps my heart
so fast,
This is a world full of ridiculous flabbergast.
Driving a fast car made of diamonds and
gold,
Skidding, twisting, turning on purple slime
mould.
Rescuing helpless kittens stuck in gigantic
trees,
Whilst hanging by my little finger from a
trapeze.
I've had so many adventures; the hero

the end,
It's a shame to wake and find that it was all
just pretend.
But breakfast is always waiting downstairs to
be eaten up,
If only the day would pass so back to dreams
could speed up.



Ryan
age 10
First Place



Judges Comments

A tour de force of poetic image, rhythm and rhyme by a natural writer with serious talent and potential. The poem essays the endlessly inventive stream of consciousness of some dreams with wit and flair, aided by a superbly rich vocabulary. This is a brilliant work of true joy.

Pretend

Dreams can take you away to incredible
places,
Candy worlds and gummy faces.

Caramel rivers gooey and sweet,
Soft, fluffy marshmallow clouds under my feet.

Smiley faces, family and friends that I love,
Raining down like jelly tots from above.

Flying past chocolate trees,
Ice cream hills and cherryade seas.

Fun dreams make me happy.

Dreams can take you to weird and dark places,
Worried and running from scary faces.

Giant spiders creeping and venomous snakes,
The boy from Matilda that ate too much cake.

The fog clears now the day has begun,
I wait until nightfall to dream the next one.



Judges Comments

I enjoyed this playful, cartoonish dream poem, rippling with some delicious rhymes and sweet, comforting imagery. The confectionary landscape conjured up would not be out of place in Willy Wonka's chocolate factory, so it worked very well having another Roald Dahl reference there as well – a simple but satisfying piece.

Dreams

I have a dream that someday I will become a teacher.

No one can stop me from becoming a mechanic.

All I want to be is a horse rider.

All I want to be is a fashionista.

My dream is to be a professional footballer.

No one can stop me from wanting to be a singer.

All I want is a motorbike.

I keep dreaming to have a watch.

My dream to have a phone is unstoppable.

These are all dreams that my friends have.

Message for you:

Think before you say. Don't laugh at people for what they believe, want or want to be. This can upset them and make them hide what they truly want and pretend to like something they dislike and this will upset them.

If someone is doing this to you, don't worry just be yourself, they shouldn't do it anyway so you shouldn't need to worry.

Here is a story that happened to me:

I love football, but all the boys kept saying that I'm weird and I cannot like it as I'm a girl, they also made jokes about me, but I didn't listen to them. Eventually they got bored of doing this and I was not unhappy anymore. It was like a DREAM come true for them to stop.

Notes:

Don't let anyone shatter your dreams!

No one has the power to shatter your dreams unless you give it to them!

If someone does this ignore them!

You'll get to your dream in the end!

Never stop believing in yourself and your dream!

You can do it!



Judges Comments

This stood out as the only piece to treat the idea of a dream as an achievable aspiration, which it did so with drive, passion and energy. The challenges of having what some perceive as an unconventional dream were brought to life with real feeling, as well as humour and intelligence.

My Dad

I had a dream...my Dad went to soft play with me. We had a lovely time at soft play. He stayed and sat down with his friend because he only had one leg. His other one was a robot one. We ate sausages, chips and ketchup and drank a smoothie (not Coke!). Then we went home on a bus together. But now he's dead. (I don't like saying 'dead' 'cos it makes me really sad). But I had a lovely time with my Dad. I remember him in a picture I have near my bed and one on the wooden shelf in my room. I drew a picture of me and my dad on a rock in our garden and we put a message on a balloon to remember my dad and he loved me. I loved him. He was very special with me. When I have a dream I tell it to Lind and Shaun.



Judges Comments

A thought-provoking piece of writing and a completely different take on the theme of dreams. There is a wistful looking-back and a deep sense of missing. It felt truly personal and very touching to read.

The Wonders of Dream

It all started on the night of June 18th. I was just settling in for prominent night's sleep when as soon as I drifted off, I found myself in a new world! It was breath-taking, everything was so vivid but it was peculiar, I had never seen anything like it! I found myself wandering off into this theme park; it was called 'The Wonder Empire'. It was nothing like the theme parks you would see nowadays (it was more like a party house).

I soon got over it but something was bugging me, it just wasn't normal. I went 'round scanning everything to try to make that thing go away but I just couldn't, it was impossible! After scanning I found something, it looked like a trap door. I opened it and it led to a staircase, I ended up walking down them and finding something that is the most uninspiring thing ever especially for a fourteen year old to see!

The basement was filled with my little pony things. Surprisingly they were not full pony dolls. It was just their plastic pony heads. I thought it was really weird. Yet when I ended up trying to leave. I found myself locked in! But all of a sudden I found myself floating and drifting somewhere. But I didn't know where...

It wasn't normal as I didn't find myself in the same place. I was at my favourite place where my parents and I used to play. It felt weird because I hadn't been there in years on hold, yet I didn't feel alone. It was like something else or someone else was there yet I didn't know who. I looked around and I saw shadows of me and my parents playing. It was like the olden days.

It was amazing and I just wish we could do it again. Then I saw a little fox with navy blue fur, fully white glowing eyes and a quarter moon symbol on its head. It was so cute yet weird because it could talk.

"Hello, I'm midnight your friendly fox friend!" chuckled Midnight.

I thought to myself is this real? Am I dreaming? I looked around and everything seemed real!

"This is real you know! I'm not pretending! Even stroke me!" laughed Midnight.

Yet I still didn't believe him, but I still stroked him and he was real, it was amazing I loved it! I had a friend that would listen to me and help get me out of danger! It was spectacular like nothing I had ever seen before. I could trust someone! It was realistic and awe-inspiring!

Now I'm sixteen and I still remember 'The Wonder Empire' and me and Midnight are still friends. But he isn't only a fox; I found out that he was also a human! You may be wondering if I'm the only one with a magical fox, trust me I'm not, secretly you might have one too! Maybe or maybe not? Their hearts stopped. Trust me...



Judges Comments

There is great energy to this writing, communicating both the absurd nature of dreams and also a delight in words. I very much enjoyed how it breaks into dialogue and the way it ends so unexpectedly

Lower Secondary Category

Age 11-14 Years



Ad Astra per Aspera

The boy gazed up at the moon from the earth
and thought,
I want to be up there, I want to make history,
I want to make my family proud.
He started at school, making friends, having
fun,
Yet he dreamed of feeling the sun.
He began to achieve, wanting to go far,
Yet he still dreamed of flying high amongst the
stars.
He felt afraid, tempers were high,
Yet he still dreamed of nebulas bright, vast in
the midnight sky.
He grew up, home to a different place,
Yet he still dreamed of reaching outer space.
He made good choices, got into university,
Yet he still dreamed of floating in infinity.
The relationship broke, a loving bond
destroyed,
Yet he still dreamed of a
deep black void.
Staring at the bottom of his glass,
Same old empty feeling in his heart,
Their love built slow, it went so fast.
His dream came slow, it could go so fast.
He met her on a Winter morning,
When the air was cold and snow was falling,
But very soon the the Spring was dawning,
And with it came the love and dream, an end to
mourning.
It hadn't been easy, training at such a pace,
But the bond was rekindled,
There was always a spare seat by the
fireplace.
And yet he still wasn't alone, his wife had

given birth,

The man thought all these things as he
stood on the moon, and gazed down on the
Earth.



Judges Comments

I thought this poem had a fantastic rhythm and would be really powerful when read aloud. I also enjoyed the circular aspect of the poem, beginning and ending with the moon. It gave the poem a real sense of coherence. And the themes of hope and resilience were hugely uplifting. A wonderful read!

Dreams Can Be for the Better

Pay attention to this family,
Who accepted me happily,
The family who helped me learn,
So my education didn't burn.
Whenever sad times arrive,
They helped me to thrive,
At one time my mind felt colourless,
Guiding me in the right direction was my
Foster family.
At euphoric times,
It was if there were chimes,
surrounding the air,
And everything was fair.
I am proud to be part of this family,
The people who cared for me and my
brother,
Who was the other.
I just wanted to say from the bottom of
my heart,
Thank you very much for the things you
have done,
I appreciate your work and your
commitment.
Pay attention to this family,
Who have changed lives for young
people,
In the past this was my dream,
Now in the present my dreams have
come true,
Now my dreams are my reality,
For me and for you.
In my present and my future I will learn
To broaden my horizon to become what I
want to become.



Judges Comments

I loved the repeated call for action in the poem, of paying attention to the family that had made a difference to the writer. A sense of gratitude, love and hope emanated from every line of this poem and I felt swept up in the positivity and courage of the writer.

Dreams

Where do I start? Oh yeah my nightmare...

Growing up as a child, I always felt different. I lived with my family yet my life wasn't as happy as you'd imagine it to be. I was bullied and abused and because of this I became a bully myself. I dreamt almost every night of a loving family, a nice home and a family that cared for me. Yet the more I dreamt of that better life, the worse my life got. It almost felt as if they could tell what I was thinking and yet somehow that made me feel guilty - they had put me through so much. Yet it still didn't stop there, eventually when I managed to escape, I was still being pressurised into seeing them and reliving the horror of watching them playing happy families and trying to fool everyone. Then the unthinkable happened in a place that I felt safe, with a person I felt safe with, but nobody listened to me when I said I didn't want contact, so why would they believe me about something as serious as this?

I have carried this secret for six years in fear of being ignored and helpless and have only recently begun to speak out about it - even then I haven't explained everything. Thanks to my loving family who do care about me I was able to speak out and the dreams I previously mentioned are now a reality. I finally feel safe and secure and because of that I am able to speak about my previous experiences. My dreams are now a reality thanks to my nightmare. The nightmare that caused me to cry myself to sleep every night because I was hurting, the nightmare that secluded me from others, the one that made me feel alone. Had all this not happened I wouldn't be where I am today.

My life has been changed for the better. I never dreamt I'd actually be able to escape the horrors of my own family and the burdens that they inflicted upon me and yet I have and will continue to do so. In a strange way I'm very thankful for all that has happened in my life, it has led me on a journey to discovering myself and what it means to be part of a family. I can now say that I am extremely happy with my life and how good it has become. I am able to look forward instead of backwards and enjoy the future that I have with my family and friends. A future of happiness, a future of success and a future where I feel safe in my own home. I have overcome my fears and tackled them head on and I am now a stronger person because of it.

I have had an amazing turn around in my life and I'm so glad this has happened because I couldn't be in a better place than I am today.

Judges Comments

This piece of writing felt so courageous and full of heart.



Dream

Sometimes in life there are battles that can
just not be fought,
Sometimes in life there are fears that can just
not be overcome.

I try I try, I dream I dream, I love I love but
when I think of you it drains out of me.
I lie in bed and dream of you, I want to be in
your arms again and laugh like we used to.
I cry I cry, I laugh and smile but the thought of
you makes me want lie down and die. But all I
have to do is keep on waiting until the dream
is done.

Sometimes in life there are problems that can
just not be solved

Sometimes in life there are dreams that are
waiting to be told.

I live I live, I see I see, I mean I mean, what I
say to you when we meet, but I never told you
how much I miss you.

I lie in bed and dream of you, I want to be in
your arms again and laugh like we used to.
I cry I cry, I laugh and smile and I know that
the dream is on its way now.

Days, months, years go by and I still dream
for it to come.

Oh and I still dream, for it, to come...



Judges Comments

I adored the line: 'sometimes in life there are dreams that are waiting to be told' and the use of repetition was really engaging, as was the powerful use of a shorter last line to finish. I could really imagine watching this poem performed on stage. Powerful stuff!



Dreams Are For Everyone

I have many dreams
Some of them won't happen
But you never know
If you don't put in the effort.

I've wanted more clothes and fame
People swooning at my name
Fame and fortune isn't everything
And to me family means more
But that doesn't stop you from pursuing your
dreams.

I may have struggled previously
But no need to let that stop me from achieving
my goals.

I despise reading, homework and maths
To be honest I'd rather keep downloading
apps
But my future is in my hands
So I seriously need those exams.

I wanna keep the friends I have forever
So we can sing, laugh and cry together
Sharing memories, achievements and pain
Good times, bad times repeated over and
over again.

Follow your dreams wherever it leads
Don't get distracted with less worthy needs.

I hold on tight to my dreams
For if my dreams die
To me, sleeping without them is like a broken-
winged bird

That struggles to fly.

So you hold on tight to your dreams
'Cuz when they go
It's like a barren field
Bitter, lifeless, low.

My message to you is to take all that you've
become
To be all that you can be
Soar above the clouds
And let your dreams set you free.

No need to let the past define anyone
Especially me
As all I can do is be strong, carry on and be
the best I can be.



Judges Comments

I really felt a sense that the writer knew where they were taking me and layered the lines with an interesting mix that all offered hope. The idea that Dreams are for everyone was one that I much needed at the time that I reading it. And all great pieces of writing fulfill a need. Thank You.

Daydreaming

The rain was rather comforting, more so than any words of sympathy or hug ever could. It was such a bizarre feeling, having the rhythmic droplets tap furiously against your skin and the winter's cold engulf you in a numbing embrace. All the while your head was clouded, full of thoughts hanging around before leaving a horrible scar.

Dark, damp branches with near to no leaves provided a pitiful shelter, and birds huddled together in an attempt to get the cold away.

She sat on the lonely bench under the pitiful tree, her backpack discarded on the concrete path as she rested her head on her wet hand. Like loose laces, her headphones hung steadily down. She gripped her phone tighter. Letting the song on repeat fill her head, she fluttered her eyes shut, needing to feel that everything will get better.

All she could do was try to think of a simpler time, or maybe a made up time with a made up persona. Like a life that she wished she had, but didn't. The fake sunshine in her head was happy and she expanded on the thought with bright trees and cheerful smiles. Surely that would be more comfort than the rain. Yet, the dreamer felt so distant from that world that it was of no importance to her.

It was merely fiction, purely her imagination.

The lush leaves blew with the fresh breeze as a light smell of blueberry pancakes danced in the sun. The rumble of laughter was like a gift so precious and so dear, that the dreamer smiled before retracting it like a light from a torch. Winter was long gone in her head, and the dreamer could already feel the warmth of the radiant sun against her sickly sawdust skin.

In the midst of the euphoric thought, a mirage hidden in her head, what can only be described as a soft lulling voice danced into her mind. She frowned slightly as she squeezed her eyes. It was something she never heard. Inviting and soft spoken. Kind. It was encouraging and motivating and the dreamer felt a bit relieved hearing it. Yet, she wished the voice was next to her, wished that dreams come true. That it wasn't imaginary and wishful.

“Um, ‘scuse me—”

It was as if the dreamer had received an electric shock because her body jolted. Her eyes shot open. Her heart, racing faster than the thoughts inside her head, matched the pace of her short pants of air.

“—Ah, sorry! I...” the girl speaking had fair, glowing hair and the stammers escaping her lips sounded rather embarrassed and bashful.

The dreamer widened her empty eyes, noticing the umbrella shielding her and the blonde girl only managing to keep her hood up.

“I didn’t mean to interrupt your... daydream? But, um—you’re,” she paused, seemingly deciding whether to sit down, “you’re gonna catch a cold”.

With a small nod, her empty eyes managed to show light.

“No, it’s quite alright.”



Judges Comments

I loved the lush use of language in this one. The author really took their time to paint a fantastic introverted world. One that really conjured up the sentiment of someone being alone with their drifting thoughts. The emotional detail of “gripping her phone tighter” as it plays a song that is comforting is beautiful. Almost as if it will bring her closer to the source of the song...magical!

Upper Secondary Category Age 15-17 Years

Sponsored By

Nick and Katie Searl



Not Quite Alive, Not Quite Dead.

I lay down, cushioned by the cloud beneath me. Golden strands fell past my shoulders floating in the gentle breeze. Above the clouds it was pure and light. Above the clouds it was quiet. Above the clouds it was tranquil.

The sun was slowly setting, an authentic swirl of oranges, marigolds and rose. It was beautiful, the glow radiated from the sky like angels shining above and all around me. There was no pain here, no suffering, and no hurt. There was no war, or fighting or screams. Everyone was happy, content with themselves and others. Why couldn't I start here, instead of the other past world, where people were filled with ignorance and want, where people cared about themselves over others. Here there is no need for such feelings, there is nothing to gain and nothing to lose, and in this world we have all that we want. I've never experienced a feeling like this, to be warm, to be wanted, to be loved. Here someone loves me, and here I love someone, reunited with those who were taken, or could never make it in the other world, and together we will strive, together we will make it.

I stretched my hand out, feeling the softness of the cloud tickle my fingers and gingerly kiss them. I sighed, a weight had been lifted off me. I wouldn't have to shiver in the cold, or search around trying to find a bite to eat, or face the cruel night with a gnarling stomach. Here I will always be warm, I will always be full, I will never be scared.

I moved through the clouds like moving through water, gliding majestically. I hear the others call to me, inviting me to join their games. I smile. I won't fade away here, people won't forget me, or turn a blind eye when they see me neglected in the streets.

Pushing myself through the air I join them, we swirl around each other, tumbling and turning, laughing and smiling, calm and peaceful.

The sun was low in the sky, but I wasn't sure if it would ever truly go down, or come up. how it is now, between the times, is the best, not quite day but not quite night, not quite alive but not quite dead. I hope everyone struggling can feel like this. I wish I could tell them now that it gets better, that if they just hold on they will be at peace. That if they believe, they can do anything. For that is essentially the words I needed, the words that somebody should have told me. Maybe if I'd known that, I would have been okay, maybe if I'd known that, I could have held

on, maybe if I'd known that, I wouldn't have let go. Maybe. I lay down, but I know I won't be waking up from this dream.

Judges Comments

The scenes you describe makes me feel warm and fuzzy. Dreams often feel timeless, like you're in another dimension entirely, and you've beautifully captured that here.



Onwards and Upwards

My ultimate dream is to study law, and this derives from the simple concept that jurisprudence is for everyone, so that I can empower girls in my position that had no one in their corner.

As the only female in a male-dominated family that sees the education of girls as useless, I have had to grapple to overcome unnecessary barriers to my learning. I have developed resilience by enduring so much in my younger years. This will carry me into the next part of my life, where there will be fewer struggles.

I see myself in a place, somewhere in a dream, being able to study whenever I desire, with no restrictions from anyone who has more power. To be able to sit and read without any criticisms or chores to complete, without my mother's harsh words bringing me down.

I dream such a dream of such a place where all the girls who are in a similar position to me where they are brought down because they are girls are allowed to live the life they would like to live. Where no girl is expected to dress a certain way or live up to certain expectations from anyone else.

Where no mothers will say: "what will people say?" But instead, they will give their daughters the life they were not allowed to live. The life they should have lived.

They will prioritise their daughter's wishes over the wishes of a society that only cares to criticise.

In such a place there will be no honour killings because men will know that there is no honour in honour killings. Men will realise that daughters are a blessing, that their sense of worth and belonging through having power and control over a girl, which may even lead to her death, is nothing other than disgusting.

Where everyone has a home and no parent's method of punishment involves leaving their child without the security of a home. Where parents realise their daughter, that they chose to bring into the world, is their responsibility and they mustn't abandon responsibility whenever they do something they do not agree with. Where families with daughters do not try to abandon or miscarry a daughter.

Such a place where there is no female genital mutilation and young girl's bodies aren't destroyed by elders with outdated beliefs about the world. A place where girl's bodies aren't cut apart.

A place where girls aren't forced to get married to men twice their age. A place where we choose who we give access to our body to.

I dream of a place with happiness.



Esha
age 17
Second Place

Judges Comments

What a powerful piece! I found it very sobering but also full of hope. Pursuing a dream where you can help others is really inspiring. Thank you for sharing such a positive message - I'm rooting for you!

Dreams

'Dreams': A complex and diverse word which holds a curious amount of refinement.

Of course, a dream is completely subjective to every individual and could be referring to a number of different things. It could be dreams for the future, aspirations and goals that give you meaning and excitement for what life has to offer. Thoughts and feelings that help you get out of bed even on the days when it seems like someone's grabbed a paintbrush and washed the colour grey all over everything. The days where you could just retreat back under the mounds of warmth and safety on your bed and just hide away, not speaking to or seeing another soul for hours, just you and your wearisome thoughts. These dreams are what conquer those days. These aspirations, these hopes, they grab the bad days by the scruff of the neck and throw them far, far away, allowing you to continue your journey each day at a time. These are the types of dreams that bring a beacon of light to the darkness that life sometimes carries.

Dreams can also be imaginary: Strange, beautiful, scary and confusing. The dreams you have when you're sound asleep in bed, a swathe of stars and planets shining over your head. The kind of dreams that take you to different countries, or dimensions even. Dreams where you are, do and say whatever you desire. These dreams, however, are involuntary. They can range from sweet and innocent scenarios to dark and terrible places. All the same, whether nonsense or meaningful, these dreams are beautiful and show you how very creative your mind is, even if you don't realise it.

My dream is strange. It dips in and out of fiction and reality. It starts in the middle of a vast forest. Tremendous, beautiful trees and wildflowers all around. Life beginning and ending all in the confinement of this haven. Animals being born, eggs being hatched, life being created. Deer taking their first ever steps, birds spreading their wings for the first time and gliding gracefully through the air. Then of course the slow fading of life from animals and plants who have had full and wonderful lives, making their way to their very own heaven where they can be at peace once more.

I however, am living in the midst of all of this. In a beautiful cottage with a thatched roof and wonderful secrets built into its very walls. Watching all around me, I am at peace, a constant feeling of content and fulfilment. I grow my own food, fresh fruit and vegetables that I can turn into delicious, mouth-watering meals. There will be a constant smell of fresh bread wafting through my cottage and the sweet scent of fruit that never stops.

I will live there until the day that I move on to a different life. I won't feel sad however, I won't be afraid of death. For I will have lived my life exactly how I want it.

Judges Comments

I found your writing very descriptive and you painted a beautiful picture! Dreams come in all shapes and sizes and you've really captured that!



Dream on

I used to dream to take away the harsh pains
of my reality,

I used to dream that I was far, far away in a
different galaxy.

I hoped for my life to change
That it wouldn't stay this way.

When I was young I escaped to imaginary
lands –

Dense jungles and desert sands,
I had a perfect family and a perfect life
When I woke up reality stabbed me with a
knife.

I felt the real world was more like a nightmare,
To wake up happy was very rare.
I was safe in my closed eye wonderland
As nobody was there to reach out a hand.

I used to dream that I wasn't in care
But now I aspire to be like John Lennon,
Steve Jobs and Cher.

All these famous people were in care that
have inspired and made history
I hope to do the same but the future is a
mystery.

I want to feel loved for and secure
More clothes, better shoes - no nothing
more.

Now I'm safe and I feel cared for
I have people to protect me, not just the
law.

I dedicate this poem to people who can
sympathize.

It WILL get better, I tell no lies
Dream on, dreamers, dream on as much as
you like!
You WILL go far and reach many heights!



Judges Comments

I really enjoyed your take on the theme here – using the format of poetry and rhyming to get a positive message across. It's very easy and enjoyable to read. Daydreamers unite!

Dreams

Dreams are something you wake up from. I must be still asleep!

Playing happy families. Ha, Ha, this was where we all pretended everything was ok, or was I dreaming? My mum and dad found it easier to pretend. If they acted happy, they could pull it off. Pull the wool over everyone's eyes, including me.

This was a hard task when you lived together. Don't get me wrong, when it was good it was very good, but when my dad could not pay for his weekly habit it was mine and my mums' fault. God did we know about it. Well I say me, but it was mainly my mum who got the name and a black eye.

My dad never hit me but he has mentally scared me for life. Once he locked us in the house for 2 days with nothing but 2 tins of beans and sausages. My mum was pregnant with my brother, so I was 3 years old. Of course, my mum put me first, so that meant herself going without.

When my dad came back, we were scared and angry. He begged mum to forgive him, but mum screamed at him, telling him to take us to granddads. She hit him, we packed a bag, got into the lift into the car. Mum can't drive so we waited for dad, they shouted in the car until mum scratched him. Then we drove in silence.

No more dreams just nightmares.

I'm not saying my mum is an angel but she is always right! No matter what anyone says. She puts on an act pretending that she is a tough strong woman but the truth is that she's vulnerable. I love my mum but she can't look after herself, let alone me and my brothers. Mum knew this deep down.

It was stressful when my brother was born with another mouth to feed. This meant that more had to be spent on the kids rather than dads' habit. So, we moved in with granddad. Of course, she went back to dad and the cycle continued.

I just realised that every time mum and dad had a fight, or they split up, mum ended up pregnant.

I grew up fast, becoming a mother to my brothers. I learnt to cook, clean and wash my brothers. My childhood stopped at about 7 or 8, this became normal, I kind of liked helping and feeling grown up.

When mum took me to school it felt normal, because I saw lots of other mums. But what happened in my life was not normal, coming home to a new bruise on mums' cheek, tears, arguments or dad completely drugged up on the sofa. I guess that's where playing families gets you: believing that everything is alright, when really it's not. You begin to believe your own lies and get caught up in a cycle. Life is perfectly fine if you keep lying to yourself.

Life is better in a dream.



Judges Comments

Thank you for being so strong and sharing this with us. It's a heart-rending read but also filled me with so much admiration for you and everything you've overcome. Keep going strong!

Grandfather

I had a dream where I had time travelled back into the past, just after World War 2 had finished.

I stepped onto the cracked dusty path and wondered to myself who had survived, or had anyone survived?

I started searching. I could hear the soldiers screaming and crying. I heard a man say wise words to his wife just before the bomb hit their house. The women cried out not knowing what to say to her husband of 20 years.

I continued to walk and I could still smell the gun powder. The smell was strong, my eyes started to water. I knew my great grandfather was in this war and I was determined to find him, or anything that belonged to him. I wanted to go back home with something to show my children in the future. I began to smell gas and then I started to question myself, was the war still happening? BANG another bomb exploded!

The soldiers cried and then they screamed. I felt a little tear run down my face; it was like my heart was shattering all over again. This time there was nothing I could do about it. All I could think about was how so many families were broken apart and how many were yet to be broken. About how I will never meet my grandfather and I will never know anything about him. The one tear turned into many tears, then after it was just a waterfall of tears running down my face.

I continued to carry on walking when I stumbled upon a little village. I could see from the deserted buildings that it once had character but this was all that was left of it. I decided to go into this little house on the corner next to a little shop. It didn't look too stable but I took my chances and hoped for the best.

I went into what looked like the lounge. Suddenly, I could hear footsteps, they were faint. Hesitantly I walked down the hallway to find out that it was my grandfather! Tears started to roll down my red rosy cheeks - was this really him?

I couldn't believe that this was him. I went to him and gave him a big hug. I could smell the tobacco on his burgundy sweater that he was wearing with his beige trousers.

This was my grandfather, a dashing young man. He looked straight in to my eyes and I could feel that he knew who I was, his granddaughter, even though we have never met. He reached into his pocket and showed me a pocket watch with a picture of my mum and him together. He gave it to me to take home.

My alarm went off and I sprang up from my bed wondering what had just happened. In my hand I could feel something cold. I looked down and it was the pocket watch!



Judges Comments

I'm a big fan of time travel dreams and your beautiful descriptions of the sights, sounds and smells really made me feel like I was there. I also found the twist at the end so heart-warming. I enjoyed this dream so much, I almost felt disappointed when the dream came to an end!

Care Leaver Category Age 18-25 years

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A Mind Picnic

My therapist asked me once what I would do with my parents if they were still alive. It was always my dream to go on a picnic with them but my Mum's disability and other things going on meant this wasn't ever a reality. My therapist asked me to go on this picnic in my mind and so I wrote this poem:

Bright, warm sunlight spreads across a field
brimming with bustling families.
A towering tree stretches his limbs out into the
delicate summer breeze.
A soft tartan blanket lies on dull green grass,
dehydrated by drought.
A big beige basket woven of wicker lovingly
filled with a feast of treats.
Twinkly tin foil encasing a bed of spongy white
bread where Billy the bear rests his head.
Assortments of vibrant fruits, strawberries,
blueberries, blackberries, creating a
kaleidoscope of colour in their plastic fortress.
Fountains of sparkling pink bubbles flow in a
raspberry flavoured stream.
Gleeful, grateful smiles dance across youthful
faces making orbs sparkle with love.
Gentle kisses are peppered on foreheads
contrasted by the scratchy stubble
surrounding the lips they fall from.
Tuneful laughter flows upwards, enriching the
leaves of the towering tree with love.
Meaningful memories swaddled like infants in
developing brains, saved for a day when all
she wants is a picnic again.



Judges Comments

Blown away by the story and the lush imagery you have painted. The narrative of telling your story through meeting a therapist is one of the most creative we have seen from the shortlist. Thank you for sharing, very impressive.



My Dreams Saved Me...

As a young child you're encouraged to dream
That anything is possible if you believe
Hopes of becoming a princess or superhero
flood an innocent mind,
Fact and fiction a blur, you trust all you get told,
but then find...

A princess I'd become but my prince I did not
choose,
My dream now a nightmare, a battle I was only
to lose.

So I swapped reality back to fantasy as I was
safe inside my head,

My imagination could take over and I chose to
live there instead.

I stopped watching out for green, one-eyed
Monsters because I had been misled,
Told monsters have big pointy teeth and live
under my bed,

But real monsters look like humans; they lie
and steal your trust,

Cause mass destruction, a fragile life broke
into dust.

I'd sit and stare out the window and
daydreaming I'd be,

Escaping the world I was trapped in for lands
far away where I was free.

But as I got older, stronger and braver I grew,
I became my own superhero, not fictional but
true!

My nightmare is now ended and I am safe in
reality,

My dream world was what saved me and my
sanity.

I still visit there sometimes while I slumber

beneath the midnight Sky,

But now it's only for a visit and then I say
goodbye.

For my life now is very different, I'm happy
and I'm in control

I've started a new chapter in my story,
rebuilding the life he once stole.

Though reality is now the place I choose to
be,

My dreams will always stay with me.

My dreams can develop, they may change
and that's okay,

Because this is my book and I'll live life my
way.



Leanne
age 24
First Place



Judges Comments

Very relatable. The fusion of reality and dreams especially the line about 'real monsters look like humans; they lie and steal your trust' was poignant between us judges. And we do indeed have to become hero's of our own journey regardless of past circumstances. Thank you for sharing.

We Are the Stuff That Dreams Are Made Of

You clipped my wings before I had even
learned to fly,
You held me down because of a story that had
been written for me
Before you had heard me speak.
My past is the stuff of a fairy tale.
The path of little control that lay in front of me,
Laden with professionals, meetings,
And places I would try and call home.
I was confused, scared and alone.
For I am one of the lost boys,
Societies' forgotten children.
With labels thrust upon us
By people who haven't even looked into our
eyes.
Who look not into our future,
But into the past we'd rather forget.
We dream to remember the good bits,
The memories that aren't written down on
social services reports.
We dream to know the life that we could have
had,
But now we have people with titles who don't
understand,
Saying what's best for us,
Saying our new life plan.
What's in our best interest.
We sit in silence, our words taken away.
So we close our eyes,
To dream.
We don't know what will be in front of us.
But my dreams are mine,
They cannot be taken away.
Day by day I dream my life away.

When I was little I would dream I was a
knight,
I was in charge; I could run into danger and
save everyone.
I had to save everyone.
As I grew older it became harder to just
save myself.
The scars had edged themselves into my
body,
Were harder to heal.
People had labelled me,
Broken.
I dreamed of my adult life,
For when I close my eyes at night I see,
The dreams, possibilities, memories that
could be.
But people use me like a ventriloquist doll
Words not even passing my own lips
I felt smaller each day.
It takes one person to believe,
Believe that it was going to be okay,
But they went quicker than the tears dried
on my cheek,
Our dreams are worth more than the words
we scream,
Are worth more than the life we had no say
in,
Do that one little thing, nobody could think
of;
Listen
To those fragments that have ever so
slowly had to be put back together
But are now stronger than ever before and
ready to fight

To break through the barriers
To scratch away the labels society decide to
give us
Because they thought we were damaged
goods before they even heard
Our voice.
My voice, is loud, is proud, hear me roar,
Hear me God Damn roar.
When you let us dream, we achieve the
impossible,
As we all have different hopes, different
dreams,
Different people we aspire to be
We can be anything,
Do anything that we put our minds to,
We are not statistics,
We are not your sob stories
We are children, young adults,
We are not our past, but your future
We are the stuff that dreams are made of.



Dreams

As a kid in the care system
No one talked, no one listened
Everyone there, was all so different
No Dreams and no ambitions
Everybody laughing, smiling at the television
That night there was the first time I went to
Prison
I had no Dreams, I just wanted to live nice,
So I'd go out late night and commit crime.

But now life's different
I've got skills and ambitions
I've got the courage to move forward
And the focus for my visions.

I am trying to live a better life
My family they all realise
Success is really all I need
And work hard and make peace.

The future is such a scary thing
It's bright, its loud, it sings within,
So now all I can do is wait
And see myself walk out the gates.

Judges Comments

We loved the fact you have shown regardless of the past you have the courage, focus and vision to change your life around. Success is preparation meeting opportunity and I'm sure by the vision you have conveyed that your definitely prepared so don't see the future as scary, it will be successful because of who you become! Keep up the good work.



What Dreams Are Made Of

I dream of a world where no one is alone and we travel in numbers as a pack, I dream of a world where the people are happy and when you smile at them they smile back.

I dream of a world where children aren't neglected and domestic abuse is a thing of the past. I dream of a world where women feel good and can wear a dress without being harassed.

I dream of a world where education is priority and schools teach us what we should know, I dream of a world where students aren't statistics and they're all given some room to grow.

I dream of a world where your voice is heard no matter how big or small, I dream of a world where the brand of your shoes doesn't really matter at all.

I dream of a world where racism doesn't exist and your sexuality isn't defined by a box, I dream of a world where it's okay to be weird and we are all as odd as our socks!

I dream of a world where there are no sorrowful children and that parents don't get divorced, I dream of a world where everyone feels valued and nothing again feels forced.

I dream of a world where animals are worshipped again, never tortured or abused, I dream of a world without hatred in it where the majority aren't confused.

I dream of a world where we swap goods and services and not the materials from our trees, I dream of a world where the government listens and we're not all on our knees.



Dreams Can Come True

Dreams can come true.

Not True.

Had a glum day.

A day when you were taken away.

For help, they say.

You arrived at placement 1 not really understanding anything.

Or anyone.

Dreams can come true.

Still, not true so you think.

All the way through and still not much of a clue.

I'm now too old for placement 1.

Still making the same mistakes.

Risk assessments too high.

It's time for me to fly.

Dreams can come true.

Very much not true you believe.

You live in your fantasy world.

Marrying Taylor Swift is top of your agenda.

I wish, I wish, I wish.

Dreams can come true.

I'm now at placement 2.

First of all timid and shy.

I still think my assessment is miles too high.

I need to work hard, I tell myself.

So my dreams can become reality.

As I grow

With all the help and support from others

A clear path is appearing...

Placement 2 is amazing.

I can have a future, I can have dreams.

If I work hard.

Need to get my family back on my side.

As well as my life.

Dreams can come true

It's true.

You work towards them.

You believe in them.

One day you will have them.

I dream of a safe, secure job.

I dream of somewhere to call home.

I dream of safety.

I dream of a happy, safe relationship.

I dream of seeing my family again.

As you think of these dreams

A bright rainbow appears

Like a smile through all your tears

Giving you a fuzzy feeling...

A feeling only dreams are made of...



About Coram Voice

Coram Voice is a leading children's rights organisation. We champion the rights of children. We get young voices heard in decisions that matter to them and work to improve the lives of children in care, care leavers and others who depend upon the help of the state.

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 2020, our theme is "Dreams", enabling children to explore their hopes and aspirations for the future.

Voices 2021 will be open for entries early 2021.

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 (aged 4-10), Lower Secondary (aged 11-14), Upper Secondary (aged 15-17) and Care Leaver (18-25).

Always Heard

Always Heard is our 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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Bright Spots

Through our Bright Spots programme, a partnership with the University of Oxford, funded by the Hadley Trust, we have gained unprecedented insights into the views of care experienced children and young people. Over the last 5 years we have gathered over 10,000 voices through our online surveys –

‘Your Life, Your Care’ and ‘Your Life Beyond Care’. The surveys were co-produced with children and young people to capture how they feel about their lives and support local authorities to systematically listen to their children in care and care leavers about the things that are important to them.

To find out more or discuss how to run the surveys in your local authority contact brightspots@coramvoice.org.uk

A National Voice

A National Voice is the ‘National Children in Care Council’ for children in care and care leavers aged 11-26, who are passionate about how the care system works and how it affects those within it.

We work to improve the care system through the voices of care experienced young people. Empowering children and young people by giving them the skills and support to make real change at both a local and national level.

ANV engages children and young people in co-production projects including our Ambassador Programme for individuals selected to represent young people’s voice nationally. In addition, we train social workers in what it is like to be a child in and leaving care and we work with children in care councils across England to explore key issues and inform campaigns or projects around what is important to young people.

To find out how to get involved please email: anv@coramvoice.org.uk.



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