

## Voices 2020 Awards - transcript

*Please note, the announcements of the results for each category have been omitted from the transcript so that these can remain a surprise during the event but they will be shown on screen as announced.*

### **Peter Capaldi:**

Hello everyone and a very warm welcome to the awards for Voices 2020 - the national creative writing competition for children in care and young care leavers, brought to you by Coram Voice and sponsored by Cadence Innova.

I'm delighted to be hosting the competition once again this year, albeit in a different format from what we had originally anticipated. I know the past few months have been uncertain and challenging for so many of you, and I hope you are all keeping safe and well at this time. I'm so pleased that we are able to come together virtually this evening and celebrate the amazing talent of all the young writers who took part in the competition.

We are continually inspired by the creativity of care-experienced young people, and have huge admiration for their resilience - especially in these times, with the lockdown and such. In response to this, Coram Voice developed an additional category for the competition, for young people to write about their experiences of Covid-19 and the lockdown, and we're delighted to be announcing our winner for this tonight, along with the other four competition categories.

It's also a special year for the competition, as it is celebrating its fifth anniversary. It all started in 2016, when Muna, an advocate at Coram Voice, saw a poem on the wall of a children's care home. She described the words in the poem, written by a 15 year old girl in the care home, as 'beautiful, real and raw'. And the Voices competition developed from there, providing a chance for us to hear more of these powerful voices from care-experienced young people and showcase their creativity and talent.

The competition has continued to grow since then and this year we've seen our highest number of entries so far, receiving over 300 pieces of writing from across the country. I'd like to thank each and every one of you who took part and shared your brilliant pieces on the theme of 'Dreams' - a huge well done to you all. We were just blown away by the quality of the entries and we had a very difficult challenge in shortlisting this down to just 24 pieces.

The shortlisted pieces have been judged by our panel of judges, who you'll meet tonight, alongside our young judges - shortlisted young people from previous years of the competition. They had the tough job of judging the pieces, based on how well the entries matched the theme of Dreams, the strength and originality of the voice used, how effectively the work engaged the readers' emotions, and how well it was constructed and put together. A big thank you to all of our judges for their time on this.

We'd also like to thank our headline sponsors Cadence Innova and all of our category sponsors for your kind support in helping us to make Voices 2020 possible.

Before we get started with our first category announcement of the evening, I'd first like to introduce our headline sponsors, Cadence Innova who will say a few words about why they are proud to support this important initiative.

**Gita Singham-Willis, Founding Partner, Cadence Innova, headline sponsor:**

My name is Gita Singham-Willis and I'm one of the founding partners of Cadence Innova. We've been working with Coram for the last couple of years and are proud and very excited to sponsor this year's Voices 2020 competition.

This competition is a brilliant vehicle to showcase the huge talent and diversity of our young people in care and care leavers and last year we were blown away by the quality of the stories that were entered. As a business transformation consultancy, Cadence is passionate about making a positive impact on society, working hand in hand with our clients to deliver their goals. Our team feels very strongly about providing a voice for those in need of support and an outlet to express themselves. Working on this project with Coram has been a great opportunity to put this into practice.

We'd like to thank all those at Coram for the work they do and most importantly we'd like to thank and congratulate all of you, who have taken time and effort to put your ideas down on paper and enter such great stories and poems reflecting your dreams, the theme for 2020.

We are very much looking forward to finding out who won and wish all those shortlisted the best of luck.

**Peter Capaldi:**

So thank you again to Cadence Innova and our category sponsors for your generous support.

Now all it leaves me to say is good luck to all the shortlisted young people! I hope you enjoy tonight, and don't forget you can join a live chat during and after the awards. And if you're taking part in the conversation on social media, please use the hashtag #Voices2020.

Now on with the awards!

I'd like to introduce our first judges this evening, children's authors Piers Torday and Lauren Child who'll be announcing the results for the Primary category.

**Piers Torday:**

Hi everyone, I'm delighted to be here this evening. It has been an absolute privilege to be involved in the competition and Lauren, Olivia and I really enjoyed reading the fantastic entries on the theme of dreams. It was an incredibly tough decision and we'd like to say congratulations to all of our shortlisted writers - you should be very proud! I'll start by announcing our three commended entries for the category and Lauren will announce our third-place, runner-up and winner.

[Commended entries announcement]

**Lauren Child:**

Hello I'm delighted to be here tonight, supporting this wonderful initiative. And I'm delighted to announce our top three entries for the Primary Category.

[Winner, 3rd and 2nd place announcement]

So very well done to all our young writers, it's been very special to get to know you through your words and to celebrate your talent tonight.

**Peter Capaldi:**

Thanks very much Piers and Lauren, and also to our young judge for the Primary category, Olivia. And of course a very well done to our first winner tonight.

Next up is the Lower Secondary category and here to reveal the results are the category judges, children's author Abi Elphinstone and poet Mr Gee.

**Abi Elphinstone:**

Hi everyone it was an absolute joy to be part of the judging this year and everyone who entered should be really, really proud - well done all of you!

I'm now going to announce the three commended entries for the lower-secondary category.

[Commended entries announcement]

I'll now hand over to Mr Gee who will announce our top three.

**Mr Gee:**

Hi everyone, I was thrilled to be a part of the Voices competition again this year. I've been involved in the judging for a few years now and never fail to be blown away by the standard of the entries and the creative ways young people express themselves. As a judge, it made our job very very difficult.

I'm delighted to now reveal our top three for the Lower Secondary category.

[Winner, 3rd and 2nd place announcement]

**Peter Capaldi:**

A very big thank you to Abi and Mr Gee and our young judge for the category, Steven. Brilliant writing from all the young people and well done!

I'm now pleased to introduce our next judge, author Christel Dee to announce the Upper Secondary category.

**Christel Dee:**

I was honoured to be invited to be on the judging panel for this wonderful competition. As a care-experienced person myself, I know just how important it is to be given positive opportunities to express yourself and get your voice heard.

I really enjoyed reading your pieces, thank you so much to all of the young people who took part for sharing them.

[Results announcement]

A massive well done to our winner and all of the shortlisted writers! We hope that this inspires you to keep writing, because we really need to hear some more of your stories.

**Peter Capaldi:**

Thank you again to Christel, fellow category judge Dawn Foster and our young judge Louise.

We're onto our Care Leaver category, and here to reveal the results are our judges - author Paolo Hewitt and rap artist Ric Flo.

**Paolo Hewitt:**

Hi there, I just wanted to say that Voices is a brilliant initiative that I've been very, very proud and happy to work with over the years.

My name's Paolo Hewitt, I'm a care-experienced adult, I was in the care-system for eight years and I've been very honoured and very pleased to be asked to be a judge on this year's Voices competition. This year the standard was really, really high. In fact so-much-so that Ric, Lauren and I decided to do things a little bit differently. We're going to have a winner and runner-up, which Ric will announce, and we have all the other four pieces in third place - we didn't want a fourth, fifth or sixth, we wanted everybody to be on the same level because the entries were so high.

[Commended entries announcement]

I just wanted to end by saying one thing to all writers, to all the writers in this competition and to any writers out there, one thing I found of great value is the idea that success is all about persistence, it's all about persistence. Take no notice of failure, if you fail it just means another door is going to open somewhere else for you. You have to keep going and keep going and keep going. And if you persist and persist and persist, then the door finally opens and I can tell you that from my own first-hand experience.

Thanks very much indeed to all the writers, to Voices and thanks very much indeed for listening to me and I wish you all the very best.

**Ric Flo:**

I'm really proud to be part of Voices again this year. Being a care leaver and rapper, I use the art of rap to empower young people in care, so I really know the importance of a platform like this and a

competition to really help unleash the creativity of young people to help them tell their stories. So, without further ado, we're going to announce the care leaver category runner-up and winner.

[Winner, 3rd and 2nd place announcement]

Thank you for sharing and congratulations to you and all the amazing young writers.

**Peter Capaldi:**

Thank you to Ric, Paolo and our young judge Lauren.

We're nearing the end of the awards and the last category left to announce is our special additional category, inspired by your experiences of Covid-19 and the lockdown.

Before we do that, I'd like to introduce Brigid Robinson, Managing Director of Coram Voice, who will say a few words about the competition and the charity's work with children in care and care leavers, through these very challenging times.

**Brigid Robinson:**

Hi everyone, I'd like to start by saying a huge thank you and well done to all of you who entered the competition this year, including those who took the time to write about their experiences over the past few months for our special category. You are all amazing.

I know the last few months have been really difficult for many people and I'm so inspired by your resilience during this time. I'm delighted that we're able to get together today to celebrate your achievements, even though we can't be together in person.

At Coram Voice, our aim is to ensure that the voices of children and young people in and leaving care are heard, and during lockdown, we've continued to provide the support that children need, wherever and whenever they need that. Whether it's through our Always Heard advocacy helpline supporting young people to get an advocate and to know about their rights, or through our National Voice ambassador programme, working with young people on the issues that are important to them, such as the campaign we are currently running, called 'Change the Label' addressing the difficult area of stigma for children and young people. If you'd like to find out more about what we do, take a look on our website and all the information will be there.

The Voices writing competition continues to be such an important part of our work, and it's been a pleasure and an honour to see the competition grow over the last five years and to read the hundreds of remarkable poems, stories and raps that have been shared over that time.

It's been incredibly inspirational to hear about the difference the competition has made to the young people who have entered and the opportunities they've taken up. Young people have shared with us the power of putting pen to paper, to express their feelings and have their talents recognised.

Many young people have gone on to write more, having blogs and articles in the national press, and reading their pieces in public. And one young person shared with us that entering the Voices competition acted as a springboard for her to get her ideal job for the future.

I want to thank everyone who entered the Voices competition, and all the adults who have supported them, both now and over the last five years. Congratulations to all of you, without you the Voices competition would not be what it is today. I'm inspired and amazed by your creativity, you should be very very proud of what you've done. I am so proud of you and hope that your dreams live on for today and in the future.

**Peter Capaldi:**

I'm now pleased to introduce to you Muna Adam, a former advocate at Coram Voice who started the competition in 2016. Muna would like to say a few words about her inspiration for setting the competition up five years ago and how it feels to see how far it has come since then.

**Muna Adam:**

Hello, my name is Muna Adam, I'm the former advocate at Coram Voice who founded the Voices writing competition which is now in its fifth year with over 300 entries this year. It's such a delight for me to see the competition go from strength to strength. I'm here to say a few words about the competition. Before I start I'd just like to give a quick shout out to my former colleagues Mel and Samira, without whom I would never have got this competition off the ground.

Why did I start the competition? Well, I was working with so many young people who would say things to me that were so eloquent and so powerful or who would show me things they had written, sometimes just on the back of receipts, and I thought there was so much creativity and so much talent and this wasn't really being reflected in the narrative of children in and around the care system and I wanted that to change. And all of the young people who have contributed to this competition over the years, who have been bold enough to put their feelings to paper and put it out there to share with us, you have done that, you are doing that and it's amazing and I feel such pride in you for everything that you are doing. This competition is a success because of you. And if I had one message to give to any young people watching this right now, it would be to really take a moment to hold onto that feeling of pride. We are here because of you, we are here because of your talent and your brilliance, we are here to celebrate and recognise you. Really feel that. Life is going to take us all to different places. I am now a paralegal in Osbornes Law, in a really good team, still working with young people, I'm no longer an advocate. And some of the places life takes us, we are going to go to some dark places, I know that the last few months will have been very difficult for a lot of us. But these moments, nobody can take them away from us and we can come back to them in the dark times so I really want you to feel a little bit of the pride if you can that I feel in you, you're amazing. This competition is your achievement, thank you so so much.

**Peter Capaldi:**

Now onto our final category of this evening - our special award for writing inspired by your experiences of Covid-19 and the lockdown. I'm delighted to introduce Sophia Hall, our Voices 2019 care leaver winner, to reveal the results for the category and share the winning piece with us.

**Sophia Hall:**

Hi everyone, my name is Sophia and last year I was the care leaver winner of the Voices writing competition. I am so excited to be back again this year as a guest judge for this special category of experiences of Covid. It was such a pleasure to read every submission that came in for this category. You are all so talented and it was a really tough decision deciding on the winners. Thank you so much to everyone who took the time to send a submission to us. You all described your thoughts and feelings and emotions of this difficult time so beautifully, with emotion, creativity and sometimes even a dash of humour. Above all though, we felt this strength and hope and shining through your words. A massive well done to everyone who sent us a piece.

Ok I won't waste anymore time, the moment you've all been waiting for. Here are the results. We have chosen four winners, plus second and third place entrants across four age groups - primary, lower secondary, upper secondary and care leaver.

And from the four winners, we have selected from those an overall category winner. Good luck everyone!

[Results announcement]

**Peter Capaldi:**

Huge thanks to Sophia and well done to our winner!

Tonight's event is now drawing to a close, so I'm shortly going to hand over to Dr Carol Homden, CEO of Coram to share a few closing words with you all.

First, I would like to say what a pleasure it has been to be involved in Voices again this year and to celebrate your achievements. Once again I have been knocked out by the quality of creative writing from all the young people who entered.

Thank you again to each and every one of you who took the time to share your 'dreams' with us - it is a privilege to glimpse into your hopes for the future and I am inspired by your courage and determination. I hope you will all be encouraged to keep on writing.

I hope you have all enjoyed this evening - thank you everyone who has joined us. We'd love to hear your comments in the live chat and on social media. And you can read the full book of the wonderful shortlisted entries over on the Coram Voice website.

Well done again to all of our talented young writers and hope to see you back again for next year's competition!

**Dr Carol Homden:**

It falls to me as Chief Executive of Coram to bring this Voices 2020 awards ceremony to its close. I'd like to express our great pride in all that has been achieved this year and over the last five years of the awards. Thank you to all the young writers who have entered the competition and particularly those who did so from lockdown. Congratulations to all of our winners.

Voices 2020 would not be possible without the support of generous supporters. Cadence Innova, who have been headline sponsor again this year, thank you so much for standing by the young people.

Thank you to Club Peloton, our great friends helping us every year to reach ever more young people. To Nick and Katie Searl, for their support of the Upper Secondary category, and Rosemary and Bernard Mayes, who have supported the competition throughout its life.

Thank you to all our judges, Lauren, Piers, Abi, Mr Gee, Christel, Dawn, Ric and Paolo, and to the young judges Olivia, Steven, Louise, Lauren and Sophia.

But most of all perhaps, thank you to Peter, for joining us again, for inspiring the young people and for enabling us to make the awards evening tonight so special. Most of all perhaps, to you, for attending, for listening and for being inspired by the young writers that we support. Please do read all the submissions on our website and if you think you can help the competition to go to ever greater strengths next year, then we look forward to hearing from you. Thank you to everyone and congratulations to all our winners.