



**Shortlisted Entries from Voices 2021:  
The Creative Writing Competition for  
Children in Care and Care Leavers**

With the support of



## With a Big Thank You to...

**Cadence Innova** for being this year's Headline Sponsor of the Voices Awards. 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.

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

**Sophia Alexandra Hall**, for hosting this years competition with Peter Capaldi

**Em Norry, Alan Dapré, Cynthia Murphy, Abi Elphinstone, Callen Martin, Christel Dee, Kirsty Capes, Joelle Taylor**, for being our amazing competition judges.

**Rona, Tychique, Ryan, Teoni, Steven** for assisting the competition as our fantastic young judges.

**Madlug, Ocean Bottle, Parrot Street Book Club, Ink and Scribbles, Greggs, Cotton Twist, Scholastic, So Seed Kit, Tradeprint.co.uk and The Gluttonous Gardener** for all their generous prize donations.

Thank you to all entrants who decided to enter this years competition. There has been a great range of excellent and outstanding work for all that took part

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.

# Prize Donors



***" 40,000 children enter the UK care system every year, most have their belongings moved in black plastic bin bags or plastic shopping bags. Madlug is a bag company that stands for 'make a difference luggage' by empowering it's customers to give dignity to children in care. With every bag sold, a pack-away travel bag is given to a child in care."***



# A Message From Voices

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

I am delighted to be once again introducing the incredible talents of the all the children and young people who took part in our Voice's writing competition. Now in it's 6<sup>th</sup> year, Voices, the only national writing competition for care experienced children and young people, exists to celebrate their creativity and aspirations. Reading the competition entries, I have been so inspired by your unique stories and poems and blown away by your imagination.

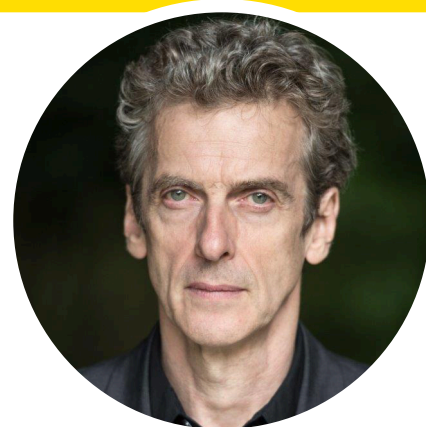
A huge thank you to all the children in care and care leavers who took the time to enter Voices 2021. I am immensely grateful to you all for sharing your talents and voices with us. Showcasing your work is a huge privilege and I am immensely proud of every single young person who entered.



## Hosts

### From Peter Capaldi .....

"It is an honour to host the Voices awards ceremony again this year. The competition is a fantastic opportunity to showcase the creativity and talent of care-experienced young people and builds greater understanding around their lives and experiences."



### From Sophia Alexandra Hall .....

"I am delighted to be co-hosting this year's award ceremony with Peter. I'm a proud care experienced person, but that wasn't always the case. I used to hide the fact I was in care, and never really spoke about it when I was a teenager. Today, after being encouraged by organisations such as Coram Voice, my peers, and the wider community, I embrace my experience as an important and integral part of my identity. The Voices Competition means a lot to me because it's all about encouraging young people in care to use their voices, and encouraging non-care experienced people to listen."



# Our Judges

## Primary Judges

### Em Norry

She Says “I was in residential care, 'Children's Homes', as they were more commonly known then, from aged two until I was sent to (yet another) foster placement aged twelve. That placement, unfortunately, didn't work out and I ended up at a boarding school.

Coram Voice didn't exist back then. There weren't too many people to speak up and advocate for young people in care.



But, if Coram Voice had existed, I'd have entered this competition in a heartbeat. Sometimes, living in care... I could never find the right words. I didn't know how to express what I was thinking or feeling. Who would understand? I had no-one to talk to, and there was no-one to listen. Sometimes, a friendly face, or listening ear of a social worker or youth worker might be there one day and not the next, or they'd not quite 'get it', or they'd turn out to be not so friendly after all. I could make friends only to find they'd been fostered or adopted and vanished, sometimes without being able to say goodbye.

So, I thought I might be better off if I kept all my thoughts and feelings inside. But they needed to come out somewhere, and that's when I discovered writing. Writing my thoughts, ideas and feelings down was a way of getting them out of me. And when they were outside of me, then I could begin to examine and understand them. These words weren't stories at first. Sometimes they were thoughts, sometimes feelings, sometimes things people had said to me - the good and the bad - but I quickly realised how lighter I felt not carrying them around inside me all the time. And nowadays, I'm never without a notebook.

I'm so happy and honoured to be able to help judge this competition. I'm particularly inspired by, and interested in, this year's theme too: What Makes Life Good?

Sometimes, if you might not be living with who you'd like to, or if events have been worrying or scary, it can be very difficult to focus on, and remember, what makes life good. But there is always something. We just may need to search extra hard for it. Sometimes it really is as simple as a cold glass of water on a hot day, and sometimes it can be a kind smile from a stranger.

I'm really looking forward to celebrating what makes life good with the young people who've entered the Voice's competition this year!"

### Alan Dapré

Alan Dapré is a care experienced British writer who has successfully written for television, radio and publishers for over 20 years, with over 60 published works.

He says - “It's been a pleasure to read and explore so much wonderfully creative writing by care experienced children. Pieces that resonate and reflect the lives and concerns of talented young writers. I wish I'd had such an opportunity to share my thoughts when I was in care. Having a voice is so important.”



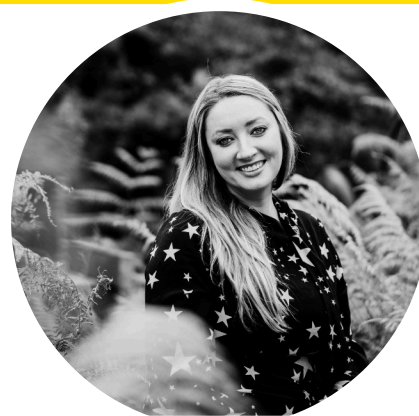
# Our Judges

## Lower Secondary Judges

### Cynthia Murphy

Cynthia is a Young Adult fiction writer, whose first book *Last One To Die* was published earlier this year, and she is currently working on her second.

She says - 'I loved the whole process of judging, particularly working with a previous winner to judge some stunning entries!'



### Abi Elphinstone

Abi Elphinstone grew up in Scotland where she spent most of her childhood running wild across the moors, hiding in tree houses and building dens in the woods. After being coaxed out of her tree house, she studied English at Bristol University and then worked as an English teacher in Africa, Berkshire and London.

She is the bestselling and multi-award shortlisted author of THE UNMAPPED CHRONICLES (EVERDARK, RUMBLESTAR, JUNGLEDROP), SKY SONG & THE DREAMSNATCHER TRILOGY. When she's not writing, Abi volunteers for Beanstalk, speaks in schools and travels the world looking for her next story. Her latest adventures include living with the Kazakh Eagle Hunters in Mongolia and dog-sledding across the Arctic.

Abi says – Here are my top tips for aspiring writers:

- Carry a notepad with you everywhere. As a writer you're like a detective: watch the world for the things that others miss...
- Look up and out from your screens. There is so much wonder out in the wild and so many stories to be found there
- Never be afraid to fail. It took me 7 years, 3 failed books and 96 rejection letters from literary agents to get my first book deal. Don't give up!



## Upper Secondary Judges

### Callen Martin

Callen is Care Experienced and currently working within a literary agency whilst working on his own young adult fiction.

He says – “Reading and writing have always been important to me, especially as I grew up in care and turned to them as ways to escape or process the things happening in my life.

Even now, as a grown-up, they are the two things that inspire me and keep me going, more than anything else.

This year, I am absolutely thrilled to be a judge on the Coram Voice 2021 competition. I am excited to read the type of stories I was desperate for as a child.”



## Our Judges

### Christel Dee

Christel is a care-experienced author and Whovian. Her books include *Doctor Who: The Women Who Lived: Amazing Tales for Future Time Lords*. She also hosts her own Podcast "From Care to Where?" hosting interviews with inspirational care leavers (including some of the other judges!)

She says: "I'm really looking forward to reading everyone's submissions for this year's Voices Competition!

Especially after such a difficult year for young people, I'm excited to hear where people's imaginations have taken them.

Growing up in foster care, it took me a while to find my voice, and so I think these competitions are a great way to encourage care experienced young people to express themselves."



## Care Leaver Judges

### Kirsty Capes

Kirsty is a care experienced Author with her debut novel *Careless* described as The Hottest Fiction Debut of 2021.

She says - I am absolutely delighted to be a judge on this year's Voices Competition. As a care leaver, writing has always been an important part of my life, and helps me to stay grounded and motivated. This is an exciting opportunity for young care experienced people to have their voices heard. I can't wait to read the work and discover some wonderful new care experienced writers.



### Joelle Taylor

Joelle is a Poet, Playwright and Author as well as founding the national youth slam championships SLAMassadors

She says - 'I was amazed and warmed by the depth and diversity of the writing we received. Imaginative, challenging and ultimately inspiring, the stories and poems took us on new adventures in understanding.'



## **Primary Category**

Life is good - Pg 11

My Story - Pg 12

What makes life worth living - A Short Story - Pg 13

My Life - Pg 14

What Makes life good - Pg 15

What makes life good and I'm lucky to have - pg 16

## **Lower Secondary Category**

My Good life below - Pg 18

Home - Pg 19

What makes life good - Pg 20

What Coronavirus and Lockdown Means to me - Pg 21

What makes life good - Pg 23

My Family - Pg 25

## **Upper Secondary Category**

What Makes Life Good - Pg. 27

What Makes life good - Pg 28

Keys - Pg 29

What Makes Life Good - Pg 31

What Makes Life Good - Pg 32

The best day ever (A Poem Written by my dog (Frank) - Pg 33

## **Care Leaver Category**

What Makes life good - Pg 35

8th October - Pg 36

Wildlife Wonders: What Makes Life Good - Pg 37

Happiness in Dark Places - Pg 38

What Makes Life Good - Pg 40

Into the blue - Pg 41



**Primary Category  
Age 4-10 Years**

## Life Is Good. By Mason (Aged 10)

Life is good when I fill the room with a BIG loud smelly fart,  
It really tears my brother's world apart  
Life will be good when lockdown is lifted,  
It will be even better when corona is shifted.

Life is good when I make people laugh,  
Even when I have a relaxing bath.  
Life is good when I play on my ps5,  
Some games are exciting and make me feel alive.

Most of the games make my heart beat out of my chest,  
This is one of the feelings I like the best.  
Life is good when I play with my dog Lola , she looks like a little white monkey  
But BEWARE of her breath as it kinda funky

Life is good when I am around people and I know I'm not alone,  
When I'm not with them I always moan  
Life will be good when I am an architect  
And I will make you a building that doesn't look wrecked

Life will be good when school is back on,  
Go away STUPID Corona please be gone.  
Life will be good when I am on hoilday,  
In a hot tub soaking my cares away.

Splashing my brother in his face,  
He's 14 trying to grow a moustache and it's a disgrace.  
It looks like a caterpillar from out of space,  
It's NEVER belonged on a human face!

Life is good when I laugh out loud,  
When I do something GREAT and it makes me feel proud.



# My Story

## By Karys (Aged 10)

It all started when I came into foster care.  
Not being unhappy anymore I love it where I am,  
nice places to go like fairs and beaches I am having the time of my life.

Being happy is not about going to nice places  
and having a big amount of money,  
its about friendship laughter being there for other people,  
happiness is strong I'm not  
just happy at home, I'm also happy at school.

It's a delight to be at school being with  
teachers and friends; friends are a very special thing to me and  
I am very grateful to have them.

My life has been tough, but in the whole wide world  
there are people who can change that.  
At first, I thought fostering wasn't a good idea  
until I met my foster carers who changed  
my life forever!



# What Makes Life Worth Living - A Short Story

## By Lydia (Aged 10)

At the moment, you might want to sit in a corner and cry, because of the current pandemic (Coronavirus). Although you may not like what is going on in the world, it makes us closer as a country. It makes you closer, as a family. We have all felt the same way in recent months, but, if you look closer into the lives of other people, then, you might see life is worth living even if you are stressed or down in the dumps. Life is worth living!

This is a story about a young girl's life

Dear Diary,

My life is the worst. Dad got furloughed again. We can hardly pay up the mortgage anymore. I can't go out of the house apart from exercising. I can't meet my friends or my family, I miss them all so much. My parents are arguing all of the time about even the smallest of things. When will this be over?

I am getting sick and tired of this now it has been going on for three months. I have just finished doing home-schooling for the day. It is all on paper and I find it all too hard and my parents don't know what to do to help me. I am so bored, there is nothing to do.

I am so emotional and I don't know why. Everything is going wrong and I can't sleep at night. It is not fair. I feel like I can just jump in front of a bus and not wake up. I went to the talking doctors to speak about my feelings, it didn't work, at all. Now both Mom and Dad have no job, they got made redundant. Tomorrow it is my birthday, yay, I guess.

Happy birthday to me. This is the worst birthday ever. Dad said he was leaving the house, in other words, he split up with Mum.

I had to say goodbye to him on my birthday. This is meant to be a happy day, but it turned out to be the complete and total opposite.

We are on month eight of "Coronavirus life". It is starting to come to an end, finally. The latest news headlines are saying that the country will stop the restrictions based "on data not dates". I am still going to the speaking doctor, though.

WE ARE FINALLY OUT OF LOCKDOWN!!!!

I am so happy we are out of lockdown, unfortunately, many people have died including my great grand-uncle and my parents are still divorced. But at least many people are happy and healthy and have their jobs back (like my mom). I am glad that it is only now like the flu.

COVID 19 has been a hard time for all of us but when we are out of lockdown, we shall appreciate family, friends, education and life as a hole, a lot more. So, the moral of the story is to look forward to the good things in life, not the bad.

# My Life

## By Tyler (Aged 9)

### Before I Came into Foster Care

These are just some of the things that used to happen to me daily: My Mum and her

boyfriend arguing and/or swearing at each other, me being harassed and hurt [ both physically and mentally], my Mum's boyfriend scaring me and, I did not even watch TV or have desert after dinner.

I was often at my Auntie's, although my Mum and Auntie really did not get along at all, and sometimes it seemed like they just went just to argue with one another.

My Mum always rented houses, so I never had a place to settle in.

Up to now I must have moved schools about five times.

In year one, I had the most kind and caring teacher ever, who, at the holidays used to cry because he was so worried about me.

Little did I know, this was all going to change.

### The Day I Came into Foster Care

I was not told until just before I went into school that I was going into Foster Care.

This gave me a mixture of emotions such as:

Being worried, sadness, excitement, and stress.

However, when I got inside the house, all it took was a chocolate and sometime to watch TV and I felt loved.

### How I feel Now

Now I get to see all my family, have two families and let me tell you, I have never been happier.

I feel loved and cared for, but it does not stop there.

At the moment I have three of the nicest

teachers in the world, always pushing me to do my absolute best and help me when I am in a difficult situation.

### What Makes Me Feel Happy?

- I am loved
- I feel secure
- I have got an immensely huge

Foster Family

- I have nice friends
- I have great teachers
- I have cute siblings who always bring joy into my life

In conclusion I love my life and my family, and I couldn't be happier anywhere else.

# What Makes Life Good

## Jessica (Aged 10)

What makes Life Good

What makes me happy?  
It makes me happy to eat healthily  
I always eat my veg and fruit, 5 a day

My new family care about me, and give me lots of hugs  
I like to cuddle them back,  
and cuddle with the dogs

I love going to the beach  
And swimming in the blue sea  
With the fishes

I go surfing with The Wave Project  
It is awesome, I have fun in the sun  
I get splashed by cold wet salty water

Going on my slide and swing  
And bouncing on my trampoline  
Makes me very happy

Me and my foster carer like to bake  
Beautiful yummy, yummy cake  
And I like to eat it too, why not?

Playing with my friends at school  
Running around with a football  
Whilst chasing the boys around the playground!

Watching TV with my foster carers  
At the weekend we watch movies  
It makes me feel really, really happy and loved

I love, love, love, reading my books, because it takes me to a magical world  
My reading is getting really, really, really good  
And that puts me in a good mood.



# What makes life good and what I'm lucky to have

## By Tyler (Aged 9)

What makes me happy.

Is feeling very lucky...

I'm lucky that I'm alive which makes me feel free,

I'm lucky that I'm not homeless so that I'm warm every night,

I'm lucky that I'm not living on the streets as that makes me feel I'm loved.

I'm lucky I have two brother's to keep me company.

I'm lucky I have a foster sister who is very smart!

I'm lucky that I'm in foster care and not in an orphanage,

I'm lucky that I've known my foster family.

I'm lucky that I've been stung by a bee because now I know how much it hurts,

I'm lucky to have pocket money to buy scooters and skates.

I'm lucky to have so many cuddly teddies!

But most of all....

What makes me happy is the love I have with everyone who looks after me.

**Lower Secondary Category  
Age 11-14 Years**



# My Good Life , Below Ryan (Aged 11)

My forever Mum and Dad's hugs, a kiss, heart knowing I really belong,  
Not just for a day, a week, a month but truly my lifelong.

To see the scan of my baby niece and hear her steady heartbeat,  
The months of anticipation and thrill when we finally meet.

To cradle those in pain in body, spirit and mind,  
And teach the world to see them and stop them being so blind.

Running in the wind with rain upon my face,  
Or exciting Summer family parties jumping in a sack race.

Squishy things and larking about in juicy squidgy mud,  
Crazy singing, dancing, fancy dress and buttered jacket spuds.

Long cold walks on the beach, fingertips are a-tingling,  
Home, hot chocolate, blankets on the sofa, toes are a-mingling.

Wearing favourite clothes, cool hairstyles, new trainers squeaky clean,  
Jumping into my finishing pose, check me out front cover of a magazine.

All sharing, dipping, scaping out the cake mix from the bowl,  
Pummelling bread dough, rising oven smells filling my soul.

A majestic feline laying in my outstretched, secure lap,  
Protective canine dutifully laying at feet having a nap.

Diesel fumed funfairs, spinning up and round and round,  
Tents pegged and marshmallows toasting in the campground.

Bonfires in the garden with pastry twists from ember fires,  
Plugging in my supersonic guitar boom, boom up the amplifier.

Mountain bike speeding, flipping always horrific injuries galore,  
Right arm scarred teasing my sisters with descriptions of the gore.

Deep water swimming, inflatables of every size and shape,  
Shampoo and toe nail cutting I need to 'HELP', escape.

Chocolate and chicken burgers, mayo and cucumber slice,  
Keeping my precious memories in a special storage device.

Writing poems often, dreaming big looking to the future,

Feeding my chickens and listening to our charming rooster.

Climbing trees to see the views whilst watching wildlife,

Knowing now my fantastic quality of life.

Plummeting down into deep snow, gathering snowballs, 'OPEN FIRE',  
Parkour moves, precision gap jumps, what a flier please admire...

Holiday in Australia, Jamberoo water park,  
Riding the Funnel right up to the water mark.

Skimming flattened thin pebbles on warm clear seas,  
Tossing paper planes into the gentle sweet breeze.

My best friend Henry, there for each other no matter what it takes,  
Always ready to forgive each other's mistakes.

Sticking my head out of the window and breathing in nature,  
Wondering at the might and power of our creator.

Effervescent Haribo's, Sherbet Dabs, Rollo's Oh so sweet,

Not too many otherwise they would not be a treat.

Holding a hand, being able to look in an eye  
when I face my fears,

Knowing now that I too can be as bright and  
clever as my peers.

Skyping my awesome big brother in the great  
big USA,

Chatting with my beautiful biggest sister  
across the phone's airways.

I know what makes life good it comes, from all  
of the above,

But mostly and most important it comes from  
my amazing families LOVE.



# Home.

## By Andre (Aged 14)

When I get told off for nothing,  
When my friends say I am bad at games,  
When my heart is crushed by failing a test,  
When girls snitch and call me names;  
Home, home, home, I just need to get home.

When a teacher compliments me,  
When I am joking around with friends,  
When I struggle then succeed in maths,  
When a sticky situation ends;  
Home, home, home, I just can't wait to get home.

When I sit and talk, learning with mum,  
When I battle fellow fighters in fortnite,  
When my fractured family regroup,  
When everything in my world is alright,  
Home, home, home, I just love to be home.

# What Makes Life Good

## By Olivia-Grace (Aged 12)

I am all snuggled up in my warm, comfy bed,  
No-one else is awake,  
All I can hear are the wide-eyed birds,  
Singing happy, chirpy tunes,  
It reminds me,  
Singing makes me happy too!  
I am looking outside my window,  
The glorious rays of sun peeping in,  
The promise of a lazy, daisy, fun filled day.

It makes me think about holidays again,  
And to the magnificent, sunny place of Brittany!  
I close my sleepy dust filled eyes,  
Imagining that first real holiday,  
The big ferry, that fascinating ride,  
Over the rolling sea it did glide.  
Overnight on my way,  
The moon was a bright, serene, luminous charm,  
And the grand, marvellous whale of a boat,  
Rocked me into the mesmerizing tranquillity of sleep.

I'm awake now, with anticipation,  
Feeling happy and content,  
I am thinking of breakfast,  
The oozing, gooey butter,  
On my fluffy as clouds crumpets.  
Of taking Huxley my lovely, gentle, brown dog for a walk.  
Of playing family cricket,  
Whilst my dog tries to be a useless but funny fielder.

I am thinking of my friends,  
Their kind and funny charm,  
I can't wait to see them again,  
After a wait that seems like all of eternity.  
I feel LOVED!  
Kind, caring hugs and smiles.  
I am feeling safe,  
Life is good, great, stupendous and cuddly.  
All these warm thoughts and feelings whizzing around my tiny head.  
I belong, I have my place.  
All these things are what makes life good!

# What Coronavirus and Lockdown means to me

## By Reece (Aged 13)

All of a sudden I had stop going to school and I missed my friends and teachers;

All of sudden the news was talking about a deadly virus;  
All of a sudden I felt anxious about my Dads dying of the virus;  
I didn't want people to die;

I didn't want my Dads to get poorly;  
All of a sudden I had to do lots of school work at home;  
All of a sudden I couldn't go out on my bike or walk to the shops;  
All of a sudden I had to speak to my social worker through Zoom;

And then all of sudden I realised things had changed for me and tried to look at the good things that this terrible virus made possible for me!!!  
Routine has been important to me;  
I even know the exact time of tea.

Spending more time with my family has meant the world;  
I've even helped my sisters hair get curled.  
I look forward to my zoom school on most days;  
Learning new things in a comfortable way.

Becki, Laura and Chelsea have helped me grow;  
I'll remember that forever I hope you know.  
I've learnt to talk and open up;  
There are always times people cannot shut me up.

I have baked cakes, cooked meals, burnt fires and done puzzles;  
I've learnt to care for the dogs, give them treats and put on muzzles.  
I've stayed up late and watched lots of movies;  
I've chopped wood and crafted Bird Boxes.

I've learnt about the war and celebrated VE Day;  
I even got dressed up and listened to war stories from Mavis our elderly neighbour the first week in May.  
I've realised that I manage family time better on zoom than in person;  
And this has stopped my anxiety worsen.

But most of all the memories that I will always carry with me when I am older;  
Are that its thanks to the NHS and our heroes that's taken the weight off our shoulder.

I've learnt to love my Dads even more and enjoyed the precious time we have spent together in lockdown;  
I've appreciated them more and realised that this is my forever home.

I tell them every day that I love them and they put their arms around me making me safe that reassures me every minute they love me too.  
And one day in the not far too distant future that

Corona will come to an end;  
I can only wish I haven't driven  
Mark and George round the bend.  
Me and my forever family will look  
back on these memories and value our thoughts;  
On the memories of Lockdown; the lessons  
we have all learnt and many things we have been taught!!

# What Makes Life Good. Lola (Aged 14)

The bitter black liquid hits my tongue,  
hairs on the back of my neck stand up.  
The bitterness fades to a soothing sweetness  
its warmth

runs

like

a

river

down

my throat

A woody taste of roasted beans swarms my mouth

It's swirling smoothly like a creamy silk.

sipping,

Sippin

Sippi

Sipp

I find it hard to restrain myself from taking another sip.

The heat of the cup comforts my icy fingers -

how could I have lived without this for so long?

I look out the window

Watching.

a smiling , giggling couple walk along the street - as they went through an

h  
c w  
r a  
a y

of skeleton trees.

Dried leaves lay on the floor crumpled and brown - lifeless on the ground  
His hand in hers, intertwined so *delicately* yet so **secure**  
They stare deeply into eachothers' eyes - their life looking so perfect.  
A scene from a painting.  
An image from a movie.  
A perfect Christmas card.

Frost starts to creep... across the windows...  
A gentle chill fills the air  
I tenderly embrace the cup:  
its warmth seeps into the curve of my hand.  
Winter bliss  
And a coffee kiss  
A vintage shop  
And a chance to stop  
This. /s what makes life good.





# My Family

## By Cody (Aged 14)

I want to get out of care. I want to go travelling with all the members of my family.

I am a traveller so, this is what I like, this is what we do, this is our lifestyle.

The lovely part of travelling is getting to meet new people.

I want to travel all around the world again. I like seeing new places.

One of my best memories is Paris, I liked the smell of fresh bread, sharing food with my Dad, trying different experiences and seeing very smartly dressed people. I found Parisians unpleasant, only tourists smile in Paris.

I noticed the food is fresh and the hotels are luxurious.

The city is well looked after. My best memory is to climb to the extreme top of the Eiffel Tower with my Dad and my little brother.

I felt so happy and free, it was extraordinary.

As we went over a bridge, we did a padlock with Dad, my brother and myself to show respect and care for each other.

I was proud at the time, it was a dream come true.

When we went back to the UK, it was cold, wet and miserable; however, I had many memories with me and some souvenirs: clothes and a piece of rock I found next to the Wall of Love.

I love seeing different places. You never are at the same place, all the time.

When I wake up, I see different houses, different countries.

I see the same moon every night, it is always the same, it always looks different.

My life will be good, as I will travel with my Dad.

Especially, I like to explore the exotic seas and beaches.

My Dad will always stand in front of my corner. I will always in front of his.



**Upper Secondary Category  
Age 15-17 Years**

# What makes life good?

## By Megan (Aged 16)

What makes life good?

Is it the laughter of people splashing in the mud?

Or when you do something you never thought you could?

Or the scream of excitement as you run to the pool on your first holiday abroad,

Or maybe, it's just seeing how far you came from a negative situation.

See, everyone has different ideas on why life is so great,

But for me, it's simple, like when you're catching up with an old mate,

Or when everything is calm and you're never late,

It's when you get the opportunity to watch a rose bloom brightly, for all to see.

It's the gentle pitter-patter of the rain on the wall,

When you have the time to just watch it fall,

When you're in a car and you see the raindrops

on the window and pretend they're in a race,

Just so you can guess whichever one will come first place.

It's my family being there for me even if I mess up,

And my friends reminding me to never give up.

It's the perfectly-crafted snowflakes in winter that leaves me in awe,

As they silently form a soft blanket over the floor.

It's the twinkle of the first star at night,

Then, like a marching band, the other stars fill the sky from left to right.

And finally, it's knowing that you have the power to help someone who needs you,

Even if it's just to talk about their day to,

And watching their tears fade away as they break out into a smile,

It's the simple things that makes life good and worth while.

# What makes life good? By Joy (Aged 15)

Life.  
I'm asked what it means to me.  
Is it the fact that we just exist?  
Or is it something more?  
Something that's different to everyone I come across?  
I get told it's being happy,  
Which makes it all worthwhile,  
Or that it's taking risks  
Into the unknown.  
Perhaps it's finding The One  
To be with the rest of your life.

And I agree.  
These are all good reasons,  
To have a life that's good.

Maybe it's the world around us  
Nature and life.  
Maybe it's family and friends,  
Bringing about delight.  
Maybe it's being saved,  
From a world we can forget.  
Or maybe,  
It's the fact we are surrounded by love,  
Picking us up when we fall,  
And helping us when we are in need.

I was found, broken and small,  
Saved from a world I've learned to forget,  
Laughter and love blanket me now  
Though a bit broken,  
Perhaps ever shall be,  
Love of those around me,  
Have helped change the path of my life.  
Once a beaten down track,  
Now a road carefully planned out.

Though I've still got a way to go,  
Chapters to finish,  
And stories to tell,  
I just want to say thank you  
To those who have helped me so.



## Keys By Claire (Aged 17)

On average, 500,000 people die in the UK every year. Last year, one of those flickering numbers was my brother. I felt pain like never before, sorrow that had been unrecognisable before this moment and loneliness beyond human reason. But I also felt love. My mother sat me down at the table, took hold of my hand and told me, "A glowstick has to break before it can shine. Matthew is gone, but don't let his passing be in vain".

To this day, I use that message to spread the joy and happiness that I was so lucky to experience, even to strangers.

One day, I saw a man sleeping on the bench outside of my Sixth Form, and when it was time to leave I slipped a £10 note into his sleeping bag. Not because I was told to, or even because it was the kind thing to do- but because it was what Matthew would have wanted me to do.

As children, we always had plenty. Plenty of food, toys, clothes- money was never an issue for us. Until we got taken into care. Then, it became harder- a struggle, a sort of survival of the fittest. And he sacrificed everything for me. And others. When he turned 18, he moved into his own apartment, and ended up taking people in from the streets to help them, and even ended up on the streets himself. Not because he was told to, but because he knew it was the right thing to do.

And I shouted at him- I really shouted, not understanding why he would sacrifice everything for other people. But he replied simply with, "I need to spread love everywhere I go. I'll let no one ever come to me without leaving happier". Mother Theresa said that. Well, it helped me to understand- even if I am going through hardships, I can make someone else's life better.

So, that's what I do. Now that he is no longer here, I help everyone I can, sharing smiles with people, helping others with their shopping when getting off the bus- Any little thing I can do to help, I will. And it's helped make my life better. My life is liveable. My life is good.

Even though sometimes I can feel upset, torn apart, broken- I can always feel Matthew sitting next to me, his hand on my shoulder steadying me. I feel like by living my life full of joy and love, I am sharing it with him- the life he always wanted but never had.

So, I suppose, every morning when the sun wakes me up, and I tumble out of bed, I feel lucky. Because he and so many others don't have that option.

My life is great because of what I've been through. Life is like a piano; the white keys represent happiness and the black show sadness. But as you go through life's journey, remember that the black keys also create music.



# What Makes Life Good By Georgia (Aged 17)

What makes life good  
is that a question I dare ask  
sometimes thinking of these things  
can become a task

you see I think of my life  
and how bittersweet it has been  
but I often forget the good bits  
it's like they were left unseen

If I sit down and think hard  
about what makes life good  
something clicks in my mind  
and I realise I've understood

It's not about in general  
it's about what's good in life for me  
it seems to be the little things in life  
like helping an injured bee

it's kicking fallen leaves in Autumn  
and getting lost in my favourite book  
it's throwing spare coins in flowing fountains  
and waiting for my arriving look

It's making wishes in old wells  
and laughing at your friends  
it's that fresh lovely feeling  
when you've chopped off your dead ends

it's seeing smiling faces  
when you've done something daft  
or trying to fight for air  
when you can't help but laugh

for me it's not my family  
for I've learned family is more than blood  
it's thinking of the small things  
like 'what makes life good'.



## What Makes Life Good By Chloe (Aged 15)

What makes life good? Now that is a question that isn't asked enough. People nowadays are looking for those negative factors. Why people are dying in this pandemic, toxicating those we love and tossing their lifeless bodies aside. Why people are cruel and uncaring, looking down at those with colour or homosexuality and shoving them into the abyss of depression and anxiety.

I was once one of those people complaining as to why the world is so harsh and unforgiving, with my belongings thrown in a carrier bag as I was whisked to a new place, to a new face. It was always awkward at first, then by the time I was familiar with them and their families, it was time to move on again. At least we had a suitcase now. Ha.

This was a routine from year upon year. It was like being on a boat, thrown around by the stormy waves, crashing on rocks as the wind blew us further away from the destination. You're considered lucky if the boat doesn't submerge from the damage, but most of us have cold feet.

The neglect as a child made me avoid people, and I was struck down a few times when I tried to fit in. At times I wanted to give up. But there was light at the end of the tunnel. I was convinced to get back up and dust myself down, before trying again.

I was convinced from past experience from various carers. I guess there are positives from being moved around a lot. You get more perspectives than others. Different motivations. Same care.

I was convinced by my social worker, who was always there to talk to and was one of my true friends until I started high school. I was convinced by my permanent carers, as they stood with me when I suffered teenage struggles. They were there when my father stopped turning up to contact, as we ate chocolate and discussed what was on my mind. When we go out, I don't feel left out anymore. I'm a normal person living a normal life. I was convinced by society, the ones who saw me as a weak target or a way to earn more money in their pocket. Thank you, because you made me a stronger person. It hurt when you first shoved me down, but bruises heal until they are non-existent.

So, what makes life good? Is it really the times when we get the present we want at Christmas? Not entirely.

What makes life good is life. It brings all of us together in some form, allowing us to forever evolve into something stronger than a meaningless individual. Together we are invincible.

And at a time like this we need each other more than ever.



# The Best Day Ever (A Poem Written by My Dog , Frank) By Ella (Aged 16)

Whining wistfully, wandering woefully, I get what I want, in true Pavlovian style. I am a dog. Hysterical and enthusiastic I get to see my Ella Bella today. At last I can feel it, I've seen her precious cup that no one else is allowed to use. Today she is coming, today will be the best day of my life.

Morning blues get me most mornings, but today, I know it is not the Amazon man, today it's my Ella Bella.

Anxiously I wait and listen. Listen for the bell. I wait for the smell. I wait for the excited yell. Kicking my feet at the ground ready to create a storm, running to my Ella Bella. Exuberant, I patiently wait for what feels like hours, until it goes. The doorbell. Silently I pounce down the stairs, like a tiger catching it's prey.

Laying down ready to jump at her, but, no, its not her, disappointed, I go to the couch to lay down. I hear her voice, I vault at her, I knock her clean over.

From one hug to another, I wait impatiently for mine, but eventually it comes. Ella Bella gives me the biggest hug possible, crying and squeezing tight. She loves me. I missed her.

Get on the couch, I thought, I wanted her love and affection. Out of the way, I howled at everyone, she's mine. she really is mine. Once she sits down, I know she is home, I know she won't leave me forever, she loves me. Did she miss me as much as I missed her?

In conclusion my dog is my best friend and makes my life ten times better. Don't get me wrong I have other things in life that make me like a dog with two tails, but by far Frank makes me feel in high spirits and ecstatic. I love him. He loves me. A dog really is a girl's best friend.

**Care Leaver Category  
Age 18-25 years**

# What Makes Life Good?

## By Elisha (Aged 22)

The feeling of 'life is good' is not a singular event, rather a series of unsuspecting things that on the surface of things have no real value at all. Most would say to have a good life you need to complete society's checklist. Get an education, get a career, meet someone, get married, have a couple of children and live in a nice house with a garden. I disagree. It isn't any of those things but smaller seemingly insignificant things.

Do you know that feeling? The one when you find something hilarious for no apparent reason. Your mouth is wide open with no sound except for the gasps as tears stream down your face and your body in some ungodly position. Ugly laughter. People around start laughing because you're laughing and you feel completely at peace. That carefree feeling, a natural high. That's what makes life good.

Comforting arms wrapping around your body, that calm warmth that seeps in causing you to tuck your head in and smile softly. Then ebb and flow of the conversation that follows. Purpose. Participation. The sense of belonging. You look around and realise you're always going to remember this moment. That's what makes life good.

A hot meal on a cold day, the blissfulness as you feel the heat in your stomach warming every bone in your body, then curling into the sofa with a blanket and watching something on the telly. The exquisite sigh of relief from pulling shoes off your throbbing feet from walking all day. That cup of tea, basking in those few seconds of peaceful nothingness. That is what makes life good.

That grin when you play with children and that safety and comfort when you're with those special few and the feeling of your pet curling into you sleeping soundlessly. Then when you climb into your freshly made bed you can't recall what singular event it was but just know that you felt full and happy and when you drift off to sleep with a single thought. Life is good.

## 8<sup>th</sup> October

### By Courtney (Aged 21)

Sweatshirt. Trainers. Coat. I slide on my military uniform to fight the outside world.

The city is cold, and unforgiving. Grey concrete swirls past my peripherals, and my breath lingers in front of my face; a cloud of condensation. The air is crisp, by October's standards. I push through the concrete jungle. Not long now.

My feet are on autopilot. It's a hard day. Don't think, just walk. The sun is shooting daggers into my eyes, but it's okay, because there are the park gates! Yards of grass sprawl before me, like a green carpet welcoming me to the event of the season. And the season is bursting at the seams right now: red, yellow, orange leaves, swaying and dancing and falling in every direction. The sun lowers its weapon to peep through the branches, blessing the ground with its dappled light. As the days get shorter, the sun grows quicker. I only have an hour before it hides away for the night. I press on, my footsteps matching the beat of Karen Carpenter's voice as she serenades my earphones. I'm on top of the world, too, and it looks breathtaking.

I've made it to the woods now, and it's a race to the finish line. The light before my eyes grows softer by the minute, from a dazzling yellow to a muted peach. Although the canopy of colourful leaves obstructs my view, I can see that I need to get a move on if I am to make it in time. My eyes are spoilt for choice when I'm among nature. Everywhere I look, I see beauty. But I'm not here for mere diamonds. I'm here for the crown jewel.

The trees are thinning out, and I can see the path ahead winding its way out of the forest and across the field. The pavement is dotted with puddles from last night's rain, and they shimmer and ripple as my feet trudge through them. My eyes swivel from the ground upwards, and - there it is. The bench. Just a few more steps, and I take my pew alongside Ada Matthews, "who enjoyed walking here". Me too, Ada. Me too.

I raise my sights to the skies above, and I am not disappointed – it's a good one today. The sun is now in its true form; a fiery ball of gas, burning the clouds with its rays until they bleed shades of amber and crimson. I see brilliant golden light, like crevasses in the surface of the sky. Some clouds linger towards the edge of the scene, like tufts of luminous pink candy floss. There are still patches of blue showing through - the remnants of a long day. Mere words cannot do it justice. I am staring at a corner of Heaven, presented to me in the form of a sunset. My mouth curls up into a wistful smile. The simple beauty of the world I live in is what makes life worthwhile.



# Wildlife Wonders: What Makes Life Good? By Summer (Aged 20)

You step outside noticing the buzzing of the bees, chirping of birds, flowers such as snowdrops and crocuses. Trees swaying in the wind like they are speak to each other in a ancient language as their leaves starts to grow. This is the start of spring.

Spring months go by with fresh new life, and the smell of the Sea air. The taste of salt from the water as summer creep over to create warm weather to play in the sea. The Gulls cry with their calls. All flowers and trees have bloomed now creating pollen clouds which causes you sneeze as the breeze spread it around. The beautiful wildflowers field colours of reds, yellow and blue competing with each other with a secret battle to host themselves to the pollinators. A roe deer got startled by my sneezing and bounce away from the field. As it bounced away, a flock of lapwings fly up towards the sky.

As I look up a kestrel hovers and dips wings to stay steady in the changing winds. The feeling of Autumn is arriving. This is the time for harvest, for the farmers and the little tiny harvest mouse which is collecting seed to store. This is the time for migrations to happen as geese create V formation in the 6pm sunset sky. The trees look golden and warm amber, giving you the sounds of crunchy leaves. Ponds start to freeze the Winter is here, chilly Robin sings as the ground becomes a blanket of bright white, the air becomes a crisp and fresh. The sounds are silent due to the animals all a sleep this the time of rest. You step outside and you noticing the buzzing of the bees.....

You take off the VR headset, "wow is that what it look like back" - 2050 the world before Extinction.

I don't want this to happen to us, we can change this for the future and future generations.

# Happiness in Dark Places

## By Carla (Aged 20)

Happiness in dark places

Bonding over jammy dodgers  
and crying over tea  
watching NCIS on an old box T.V.

In the darkest moments, you find someone like you.  
Shipped into a strangers house,  
sticky-labelled fragile or unwanted goods.  
Welcomed into cold arms  
left feeling alone in a place meant to be home.

I felt so lost, but there you were as I awkwardly loomed in the kitchen. Your smile showed such brilliance and kindness, and resilience. You welcomed me, and it was the first time I felt safe.

In a cold house  
we ranted in dressing gowns,  
warming up the desolate experience of foster care.

We almost died doing the cinnamon challenge  
but choked over laughter.  
We poorly cut mangos and snuck ham from the fridge.

We woke up early and roamed the morning streets,  
stumbling around the mudflats at the beach.  
An escape from the hardships we faced.

Caked in mud,  
shoes swallowed into the abyss,  
you saved me from being engulfed, by the sadness and the mud.  
We wore the brown sludge as a triumph on our faces, clothes and souls.

I remember the rain and the thunder as the storm rolled in  
walking back from one of our adventures.  
The bolt of lightning mere metres away made us run, holding each other dearly.  
The bond formed as we navigated through the forest  
back to the safety of our dressing gowns.

I left that safety too soon,  
boxed up and sent to another house  
but that didn't stop us.

We met at the seaside on a weekday evening.  
The arcade lights illuminating the darkness outside.  
Happiness illuminating us too.  
We laughed, and played everything we could  
winning keychains that held that blessed moment.

We walked outside  
and crossed the sandy barrier to the edge of the sea.  
The waves were peaceful and calm.  
The opposite of us.  
Full of hurt and rage, sick of being displaced.  
We screamed at the ocean.  
Pouring our hearts into the dark water  
with the moon offering her consolation.  
It felt as if the ocean had rinsed away our pain in an attempt to unburden us.

We left feeling lighter, our hearts a little less heavy.

I moved again and again until I was out. I held those moments as a reminder to keep fighting because there will always be a glimmer of happiness in the darkest of places. Your glimmers of light saved me, and I will be forever grateful.

You made life good.  
Thank you.

P.S I still remembered how you like your tea.



# What Makes Life Good?

## By Jasmine (Aged 23)

Life is... Complicated,  
It's never really good,  
Or bad,  
It just is....  
We can never truly understand the concept,  
Who, what, when, where, why?

We're born, and we just kind of roll with it...  
Try to find reasons worth living,  
I know I'm not the only one who's asked,  
What makes life good?

I'm sure I'm not the only one who finds it hard to answer,  
But for some reason we keep trying to find it,  
Some may give up early,  
Some never really give up,  
But we all try,

Weather we find elation in the sunset,  
Or hearing our loved ones laugh,  
We always seek the light in the darkness,  
Like a solar eclipse,  
A perfect representation of something so beautiful,

In something that seems so dim,  
Life can never be truly good,  
Like it can never be fully bad,  
The world isn't a half glass full,  
Or a glass half empty,

It's a Ying Yang,  
The view of the world nor good or evil,  
But both,  
It just depends what side you view,  
The good in the bad,

Or the bad in the good,  
But that's what makes life so beautiful,  
The unknown,  
The mystery of where life can take you,  
What your representation can manifest,

If we lived in a true utopia,  
Would we really be living?  
Would we understand any other emotion?  
Would we know any other emotion?  
Although I find it hard to answer,  
I know what makes life good,  
It's actually recognising when it is,  
Because when it is good,  
I know I can truly appreciate it.



# Into the Blue

## By Shannon (Aged 24)

She has stepped out of a warm bubble bath, wrapped in a fluffy towel. She's excited to read the next chapter of a new book, fresh and soft skinned, belting out a Sia song while shimmying around the house. She's wearing the comfiest pair of joggers, hair scraped back into the messiest bun, hot chocolate in hand, topped with marshmallows and extra cream. She sips, letting out a sigh, completely relaxed.

Clean bed linen, air dried in the sun, lavender drops scenting the room. Her most loyal companion's head rests on the corner of the mattress, waiting for the call for love and affection. Laptop opened, Netflix launched, another crime documentary buffering, she knows it'll be a fabulous night.

She throws on her coat and heads out. Snowdrops. Crocuses. Daffodils. The first sights of spring. A lazy bee chills on the park bench. She takes in a breath of fresh March air, still chilling to the lungs, but welcome. Watching river rapids, the remains of winter travelling downstream. Bell ringing, cyclists greeting, passing in a flash. She makes a mental note that she too, wants to cycle next to the water.

She can feel the future coming. A trip to St. Andrews beach on a hot summer day, knee deep in the sea. Sand stuck in between her toes, the delightful grittiness. She imagines a deep breath in, wading deeper, diving, submerging herself. Back at the house, a revival of creativity.

The kitchen constantly warm and smelling of sweet treats. A half coloured in masterpiece sitting on the granite counter, next to a mug of raspberry tea. Dog lying by the fireplace, soaking in the heat, not a care in the world. Her fingers run across a new selection of pens, taking the time to decide what colour. How she was going to bring life onto paper. She can see the world in a different hue, more vibrant.

Living in her tiny box, now reinvented, face pressed against the glass of her bedroom window. Excitement bubbling in her core, fingertips tingling, she wonders what new experiences will come her way- surfing, kayaking, horse riding on the sand. She's ready for it. Willing to embrace it. Pull it close and never let it go. She smiles and closes her eyes, waiting for the day she can jump into the blue once more.



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