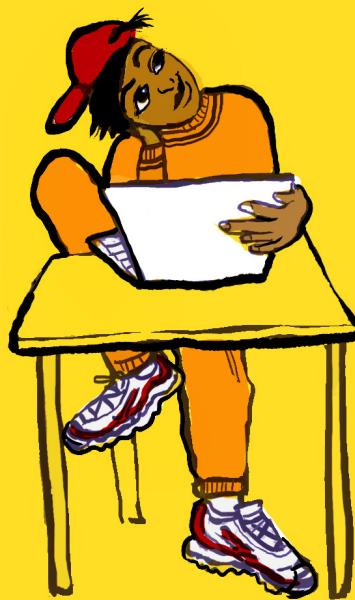


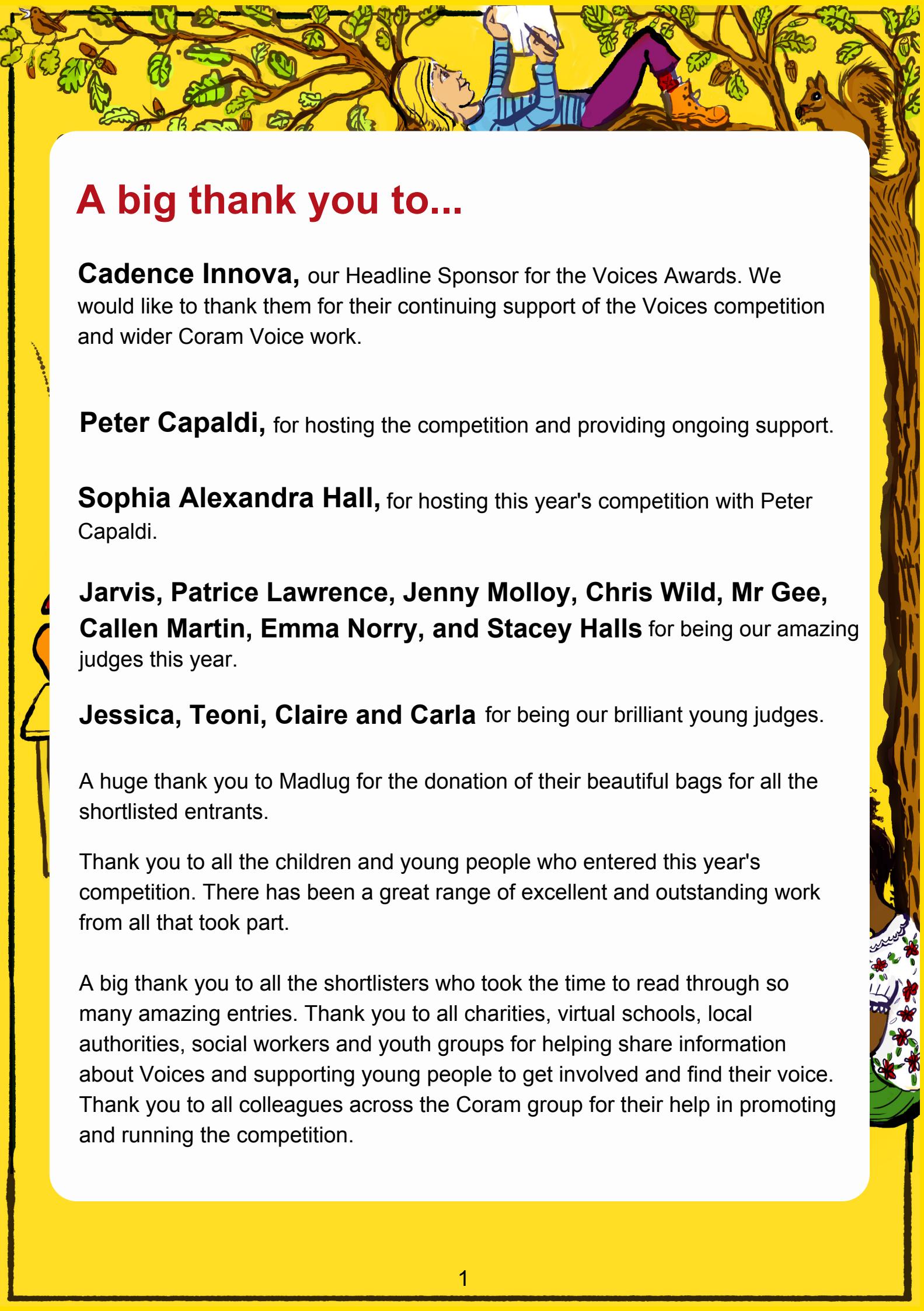
Voices

**Shortlisted Entries from Voices 2022:
The Creative Writing Competition for
Children in Care and Care Leavers**

ON THE THEME

THIS IS
ME.





A big thank you to...

Cadence Innova, our Headline Sponsor for the Voices Awards. We would like to thank them for their continuing support of the Voices competition and wider Coram Voice work.

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

Sophia Alexandra Hall, for hosting this year's competition with Peter Capaldi.

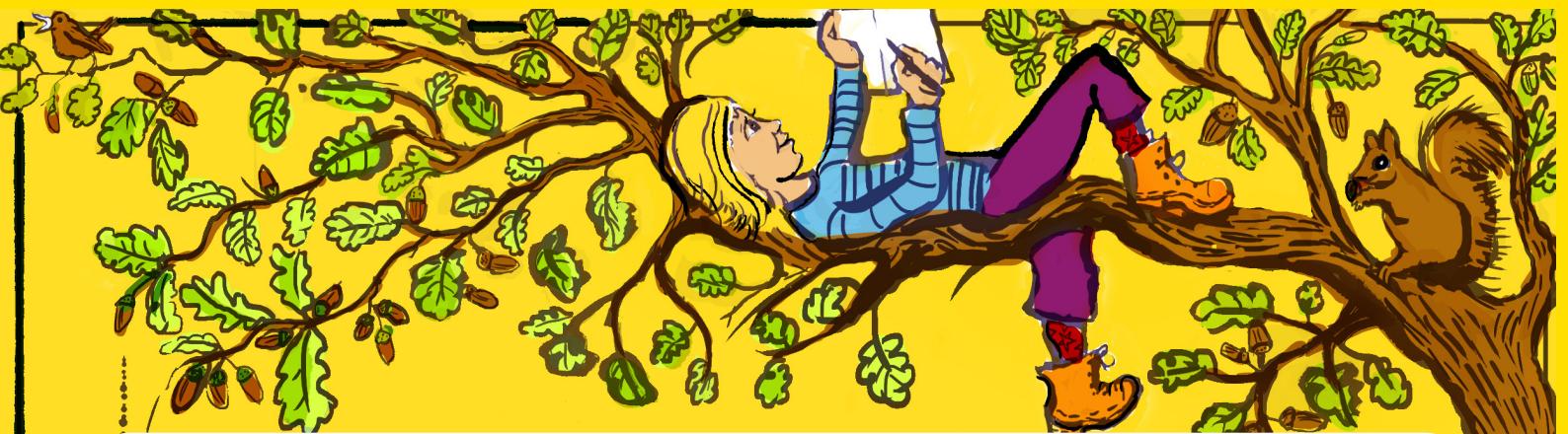
Jarvis, Patrice Lawrence, Jenny Molloy, Chris Wild, Mr Gee, Callen Martin, Emma Norry, and Stacey Halls for being our amazing judges this year.

Jessica, Teoni, Claire and Carla for being our brilliant young judges.

A huge thank you to Madlug for the donation of their beautiful bags for all the shortlisted entrants.

Thank you to all the children and young people who entered this year's competition. There has been a great range of excellent and outstanding work from all that took part.

A big thank you to all the shortlisters who took the time to read through so many amazing entries. Thank you to all charities, virtual schools, local authorities, social workers and youth groups for helping share information about Voices and supporting young people to get involved and find their voice. Thank you to all colleagues across the Coram group for their help in promoting and running the competition.



A Message From Coram Voice

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

"I am delighted to introduce the shortlisted entries for our Voices 2022 writing competition, and to showcase the incredible talents of the children and young people who took part.



When we launched this competition in 2016, we had no idea that it would turn into such an important and valuable creative opportunity for care-experienced children and young people across the country. Every time I hear that one of our previous finalists has gone to achieve their goals, whether it's continuing to write, going to university or getting a job they love, it reminds me why this competition exists.

It has been a joy to read the competition entries and see how children and young people have interpreted the theme and responded creatively in their writing. There is no better way to learn about their experiences and to celebrate their achievements. A huge thank you and well done to all the children and young people who took the time to enter the competition and share their voices with us. We are so proud of all of you, and hope you too will be inspired by their stories."

Hosts

From Peter Capaldi...

Peter is a long-term supporter of the Voices competition, having hosted the awards since 2017.

Peter said: "I'm delighted to host the Voices 2022 awards ceremony alongside one of the competition's former winners, Sophia. I'm looking forward to seeing this year's finalists and celebrating their achievements."



"I've supported the Voices competition for a number of years and am always blown away by the talent of the children and young people taking part. It's an honour to read their words and the competition is so important in helping us all to better understand their lives and experiences."

From Sophia Alexandra Hall...

Sophia Alexandra Hall was the winner of the Voices care leaver category in 2019 and has since gone on to write numerous articles for national media titles, now working as the Content Editor at Classic FM.



Sophia said: "It's so special to have a competition like this which encourages, platforms, and most importantly celebrates care-experienced people's voices. Growing up in care can so often feel like you're being silenced, or that even if you speak up, no one's listening."

"But in reality, there are so many incredible voices in our community, and they all deserve to be heard and listened to. Before I entered the competition, I never imagined I'd be able to have a career writing, but the awards gave me the confidence to develop my voice and now I work in my dream industry. I always view this competition as a really cool way of encouraging our community to explore their voice in a safe and nurturing way."

Our Judges

Primary Judge... Jarvis

Jarvis is an award-winning children's author, illustrator and animation director. His books include *The Boy With Flowers in His Hair*, *Tropical Terry* and *Alan's Big, Scary Teeth*, which won the 2017 V&A Best Illustrated Book. About his writing inspiration, Jarvis says, "The way I work is always visual. I will have an image or character in mind and I pull a story out of it." Jarvis lives in Manchester with his wife and their dog and cat.



"I am thrilled to return as a judge for Voices 2022 creative writing competition. Everyone should have the opportunity to tell stories and be listened to. I have been so impressed by children's writing and imagination, it has been a privilege to immerse myself in their stories."

Primary Judge... Patrice Lawrence

Patrice Lawrence worked for organisations promoting social justice before becoming a full-time writer. Her books have won many prizes including the YA Prize, the Waterstones Prize for Older Children's Fiction, the Crimefest YA Prize twice, the Woman and Home Teen Drama Award and the inaugural Jhalak Prize for Children and Young People. She is a Writer Ambassador for the young people's creative writing charity, First Story and was awarded an MBE for Literature in 2021.



"I have never lived in a 'typical' family. From the foster family I lived in for my first four years, to the multi-heritage family I grew up in as a child - my experiences never matched the stories that I read in books. I am lucky that I am now a writer and can bring my experiences to my books. I am honoured to be asked to judge this competition where care-experienced young people can proudly and creatively declare who they are!"

Our Judges

Lower Secondary Judge...

Jenny Molloy

Dr. h.c. Jenny Molloy is an author, trainer and motivational speaker. Jenny proudly identifies as a care leaver and is the author of a number of books on the care system, *Hackney Child* and *Tainted Love* under the name Hope Daniels, and *Neglected* published in her own name. Jenny received an honorary doctorate from Huddersfield University and works extensively with local authorities, Ofsted and the Department for Education.



"Whilst being in care myself - writing gave me a way out of my crazy thoughts - it helped me process my trauma and gave me an outlet to express myself. This is why I am so privileged to be able to be a judge in the Voices competition. Don't overthink your content - just get it down on paper and have faith in yourselves. Good luck to you all!"

Lower Secondary Judge...

Chris Wild

Chris Wild is a care-experienced writer, actor, contemporary artist, keynote speaker and youth ambassador. He is the author of two books on the care system, *The State of It*, and *Damaged*, and works with local authorities to develop solutions for many of the challenges facing care experienced children and young people.



"As a child in care writing saved my life. It was my escapism, my solace. I could close my eyes and let my imagination run wild. It was a form of therapy for me and now it has become powerful tool in my campaigning. Books can really change people's lives. Never give up and keep writing."

Our Judges

Upper Secondary Judge...

Mr Gee

Mr Gee is an artist and poet based in East London. He was the "Poet Laureate" on Russell Brand's SONY award-winning radio show. He's presented several radio series: "Bespoken Word", "Rhyme & Reason" & "Poetic Justice" all on BBC Radio 4, and recently featured as a guest on Akala's BAFTA nominated BBC 2 programme "Poetry Between the Lines". Mr Gee has also run poetry workshops in prisons and is the Lead Artist for the Rich Mix Art center's "New Creatives" project for 2021/2022.



"I am very happy to be back again as a judge for the 2022 Voices competition that empowers young people in care and allows them to express themselves. Over the years, I've read some extraordinary writing by young people, it's a privilege to witness their talent."

Upper Secondary Judge...

Callen Martin

Callen is care-experienced and works in publishing whilst also writing his own Young Adult books about care experienced characters. After completing an MA in Writing for Young People at Bath Spa University, Callen became the first care leaver in the history of East Sussex to study at post-graduate level. Callen reads for publishing houses that specialise in Children's and Young Adult books and is a manuscript assessor for Faber Academy.



"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 2022 competition. I am excited to read the type of stories I was desperate for as a child."

Our Judges

Care Leaver Judge...

Emma Norry

Emma Norry writes for children. *Son of the Circus* (*Scholastic*, 2019) is set in Victorian times with Pablo Fanque (the first black circus owner) as inspiration. *Amber Undercover*, (*OUP*, 2021) is a fun action-adventure spy story for 10+. Emma has short stories in: *Happy Here* (*Knights Of*, 2021), *The Place for Me: Stories from the Windrush* (*Scholastic*, 2020) and *The Very Merry Murder Club* (*Farshore*, 2021). Non-fiction includes a biography of Lionel Messi (*Scholastic*, 2020), and Nelson Mandela (*Puffin*, 2020). Emma wrote an episode of *EastEnders* which was screened in April 2022 and her latest book, *Mary Prince* (*Scholastic*) publishes in August. The first in a two book magical adventure series is due in 2023 (*Bloomsbury*). Find her on Twitter at [elnorry_writer](#) or her website at [elnorry.com](#)



"Coram Voice didn't exist when I was young, but if it had, I would have entered the writing competition! Living in care, I struggled to find the right words to express my feelings. I had no one to talk to or to listen. I discovered that writing down my thoughts and feelings really helped. That's my wish for all the young people taking part. I'm honoured to be a judge and am excited to offer mentoring to the winners to encourage and support them!"

Care Leaver Judge...

Stacey Halls

Stacey Halls was born in 1989 and grew up in Rossendale, Lancashire. She studied journalism at the University of Central Lancashire and has written for publications including the *Guardian*, *Stylist*, *Psychologies*, *The Independent*, *The Sun* and *Fabulous*. Her first book *The Familiars* was the bestselling debut novel of 2019 and won a Betty Trask Award. Her second novel *The Foundling* was published in 2020 and her third *Mrs England* in 2021. *Mrs England* has been nominated for the Walter Scott Prize and the Portico Prize, and landed Stacey a place on the Good Housekeeping X Women's Prize for Fiction Futures list.



"Voices is the first writing competition I've been involved as a judge in, and it was an offer I couldn't refuse simply because I was excited to hear what these young people had to say. The calibre of entrants is outstanding, and every single one of the shortlisted entrants have such strong, unique voices, which is hugely important in writing. I feel very strongly that creativity should be championed in all young people no matter their background, whether it's sitting down to write a poem to make sense of something or drawing a picture for a friend. Creativity is nourishing, particularly when it's a part of your daily routine, and the most moving writing comes from a place of truth. I was intensely moved by these entries, and I hope that everybody who entered Voices finds that expressing themselves in this way makes their day a little better, as I often do."

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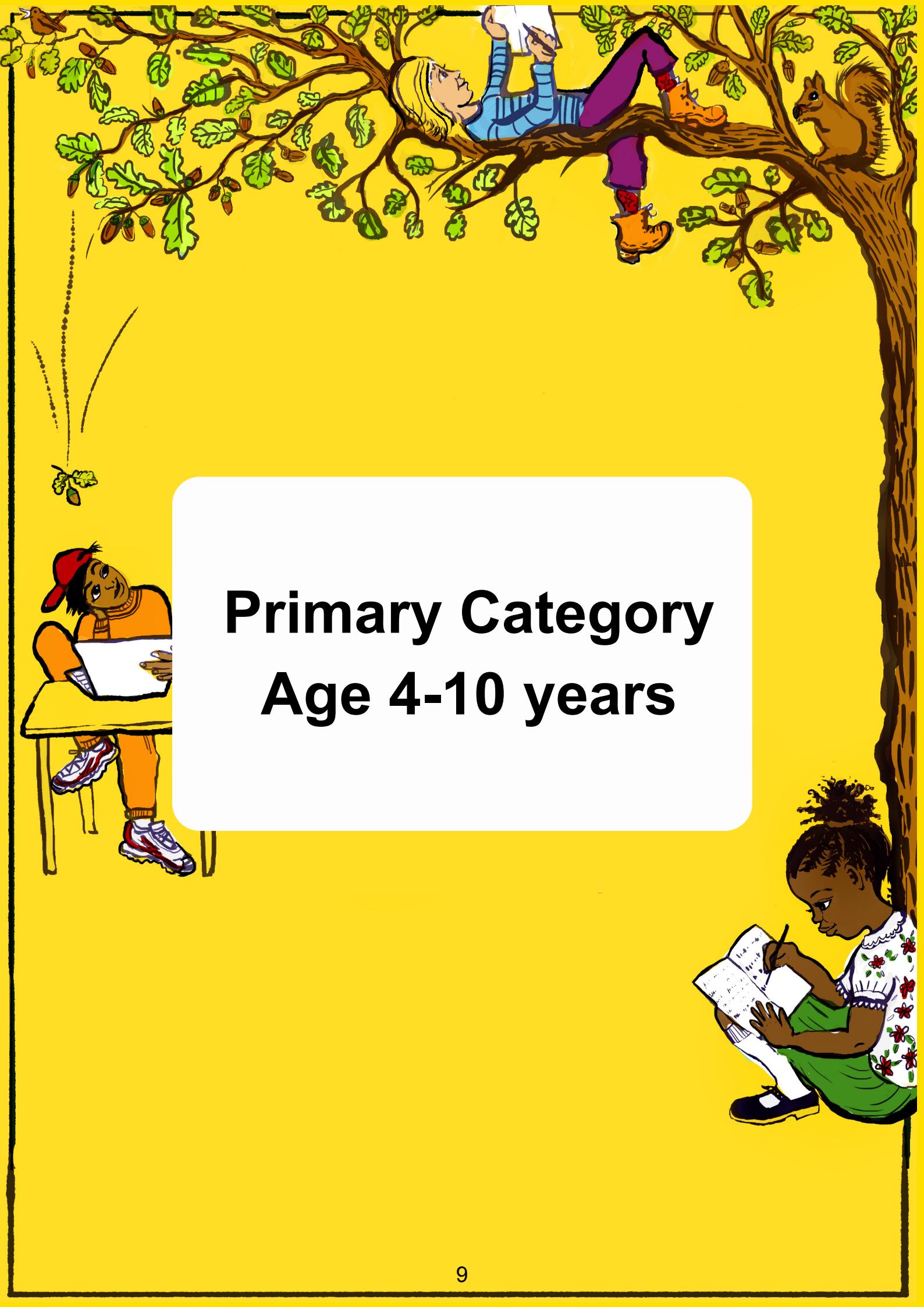
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*Many of these entries are about people's lives
and some of the content may be upsetting.*



Primary Category

Age 4-10 years

This is me.

B

Age: 8

Hello, I'm [B]. And I'm 8 years old. I love playing football and Fifa, they're so good for imagination but sometimes I get frustrated. I'm learning still and it helps me a lot.

I am almost nine and I'm really excited for my birthday. I really want Splatoon for my Nintendo Lite. Everybody says it's a good game.

Here's one fact. I didn't always live in this home, I used to live with my real parents but they were really mean to us. That's why I'm in care.

I also have 3 brothers and one sister that has just been born and one foster brother. He is very kind to us and he is 16 years old. Isn't that great? Because not many teenagers are so nice.

I really would like to live with my real parents now but they don't feel like my real mum and dad. [M] and [C] feel like my real mum and dad. And my big brother [...] isn't really my brother because he has a different dad. It really is sad because I haven't seen him in like 3 years but it's good because I think this week I'm going to see him at contact. [He] is 13. He's super nice. He is my second favourite brother because my foster brother is better and more fair.

My favourite game ever on PS4 is a police simulator because I am obsessed with police. For Nintendo it is animal crossing new horizon.

When I am older I would like to be a police officer, it is such a good job. I would also want to be an inventor because I would like to invent a hair-cutting machine that sucks up the hairs and I'm going to call it the hair sucking machine.

This is me.

Alex

Age: 10

This Is Me

Chorus

My name is Alex, it means 'Protector Of The People'
and my kindness will melt any ice touching your soul
I am the calm ocean waves shifting steadily
while the moon glistens around me like a shoal

I am a herbivore making me a vegetarian.
Proud of my voice proud of my life and let's sing together, now let's go!
Let's get more detailed, my dream pet is a tortoise
very smooth very kind, truthful, quite quirky and green-ho!

chorus

Making friends can be hard but all you need is a good joke and kindness
Ask if they want to be friends if they say yes thenyay!!!
Being different is natural, that's the truth.
Being the same is boring and uncool, another truth I say!

Chorus

To be able to protect you I need you and me to be more green.
we should be eating less meat and recycling ecstatically
let's pick up our lazy, loathsome litter and change our ways
This perfecta planet is our home and there's no planet B!

Chorus

Having a loss can be sad or a new beginning
being adopted is the same, scaremazing !
Hold on tight and enjoy the ride of your life
growing up towards the splendiferous sun rising

Chorus

This is me

Rosie

Age: 9

When I first started foster care it was so hard with all the big memories but then about a few weeks later it started to get easier and easier.

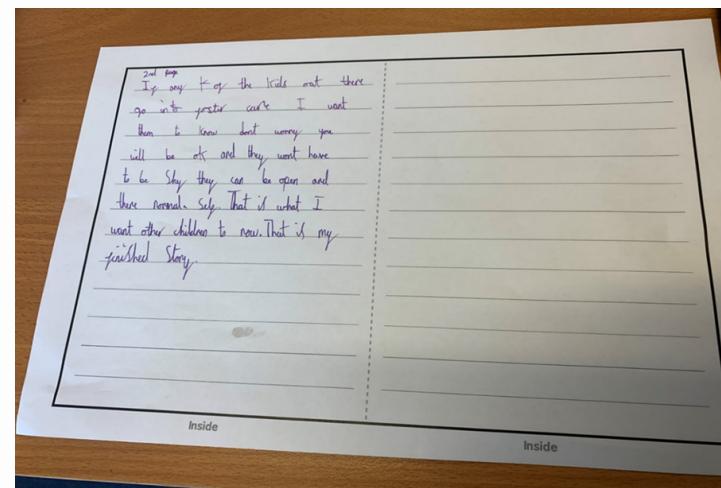
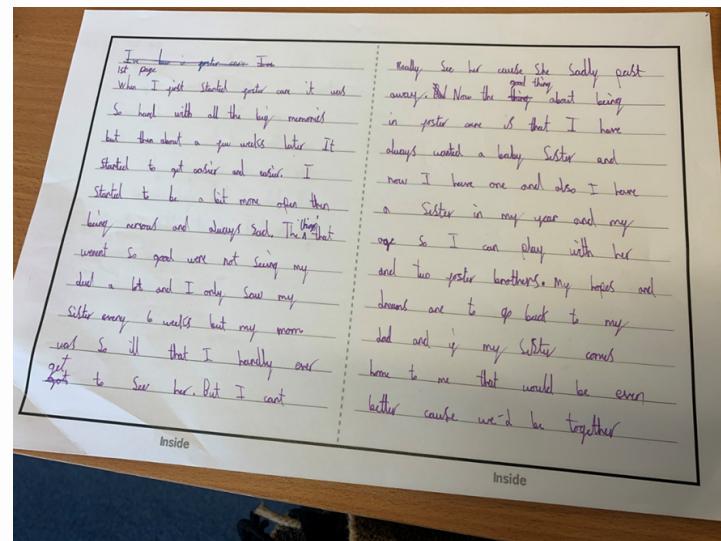
I started to be a bit more often than being nervous and always sad. The thing that weren't so good was not seeing my Dad a lot and I only saw my sister every 6 weeks, but my mum was so ill that I hardly ever get to see her. But I can't really see her because she sadly past away.

Now the good thing about being in foster care is that I have always wanted a baby sister and now I have one and also I have a sister in my year and my age so I can play with her and two foster brothers.

My hopes and dreams are to go back to my Dad and if my sister comes home to me that would be even better because we would be together. If any of the kids out there go into foster care I want them to know don't worry you will be ok and they wont have to be shy they can be open and their normal self.

That is what I want other children to know. This is my finished story.

Second Place



This is Me.

Jack

A recipe for Jack.

100 big bags of kindness

A bucket full of friendship

One thousand smiles a day

10 large spoons of excitement

A heap of caring

A little dash of sadness

A dollop of cheekiness

(but not too much)



This is Malakai

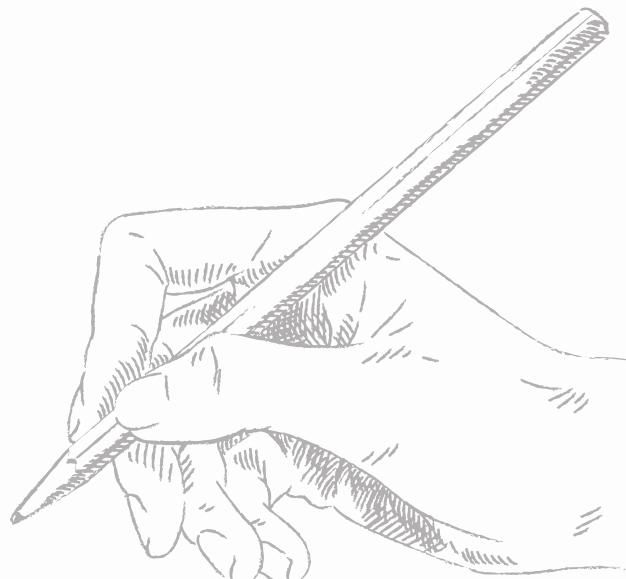
Malakai

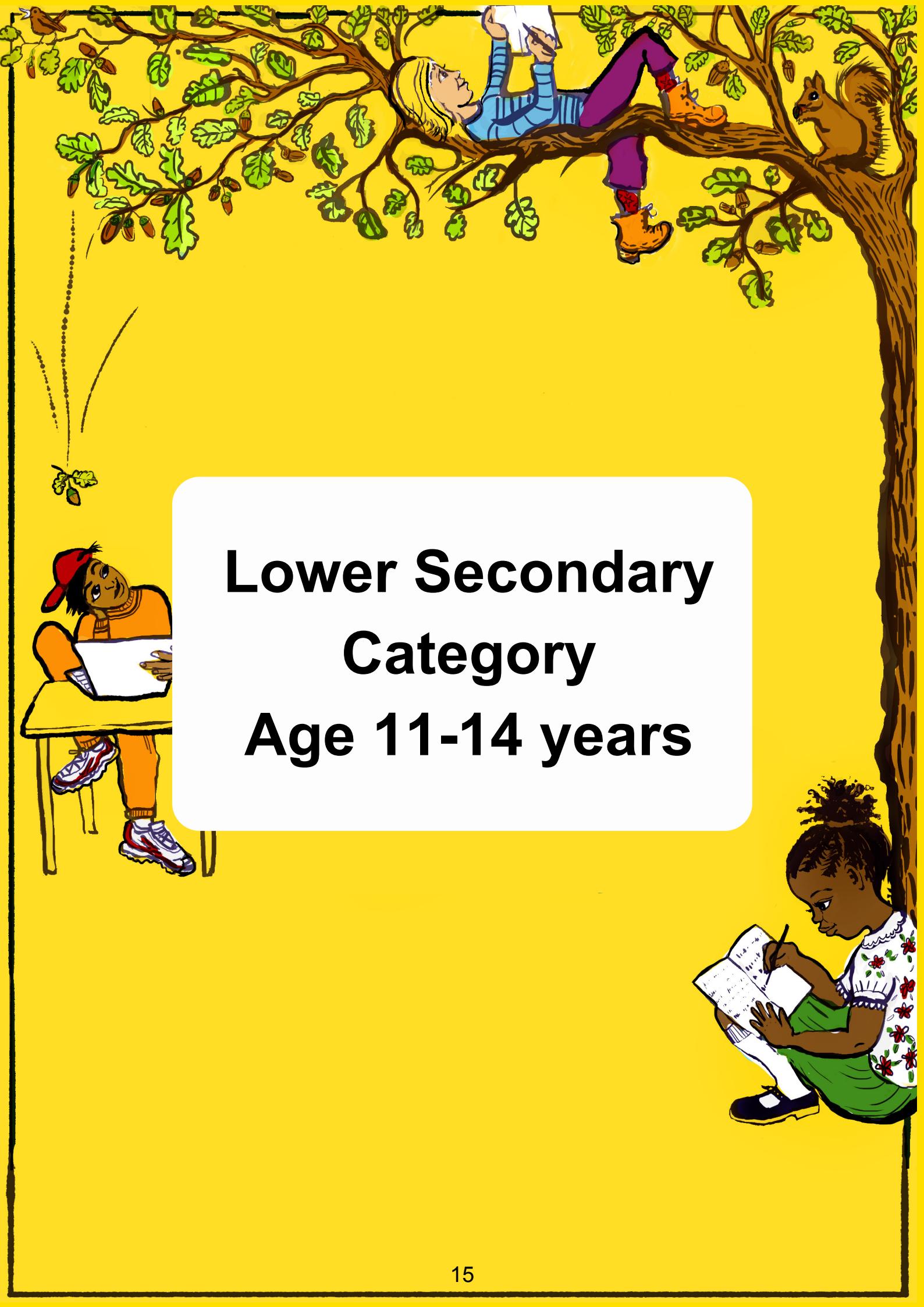
Age: 8

Commended

Magnificent Malakai
Awesome foster child
Loving boy
Acceptable answers
Kind kid
Animal Lover
I am Malakai

Young and full of life
Advice giver
Tuna Lover
Excellent friend
Super mathematician





Lower Secondary

Category

Age 11-14 years

Commended

This is me

Ryan

Age: 12

Like the film, like the song, like The Greatest Showman show, when someone shouts freak at a Foster Child, I yell NO.

I used to dance daily with my panicky emotions, as I struggled half drowning in traumatic oceans.

I am who I am because of years of lack of care for my deformities, which were used by bad people in acts of abuse and enormities.

Trying to love myself when nobody else loved me back, knocked my confidence to below zero derailed me off track.

What's that saying that gets shoved, bullied around 'Warts and all', how very true it is of each of us which can cause our downfall.

Inside I knew my intestines used to run from past evil thoughts, buried deep senses triggered as little support.

I'm still scared scarred but never not openly bleeding, my wounds have sealed but can paint a picture misleading.

If I didn't listen back then to the bad things they were saying, I know they didn't hear my pleas and cries for help when praying.

Then came along my Foster Mum and Dad's parental consistent love, suddenly my fragmented sharded heart beat into a secure glove.

Time, patience and space to find out just who was inside me, a target, a challenge an adventure to discover now 'This is me'.

I don't live now in a pecking order of affection and attention, equality fair play teasing out my wants, family with comprehension.

I know I'm fun-loving, smart, crazy sometimes off the wall. Bit of a Labrador needing running, foodie and playing with balls.

Now I have grabbed the keys and unlocked my trauma prison cell, I have deafened the sad people who tried to raise permanent hell.

Now each day is a walk into sunlight even with rain clouds around, able to cope with life and it's naturally occurring knockdowns.

No longer no more harmful dysfunctional family dynamics to dodge, now with my Sensory Processing understood I'm a glorious hodgepodge.

I am a collaborator a player in a fantastic fun family team, with love running from my bloodstream no time to scream just beam.

I have taken charge and claimed my rightful place and space, I have a clear headspace and know now for certain I'm not a disgrace.

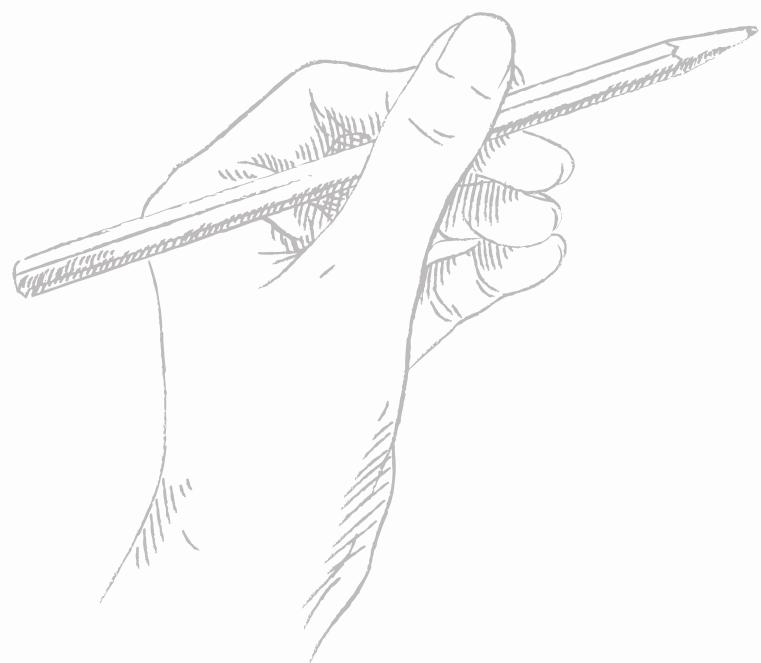
I'm a problem solver, brilliant brother, finder and giver, I've set my future target to be a life caregiver to others to deliver.

So here I come world in a few years' time and at great speed, as a caring Paramedic in my heroic ambulance trusty steed.

We all get scratches along the way on our knees and bruises to share, but all have the power to wake up from past horrific nightmares.

Take a deep breath and let it go no-one should feel they have to be alone, you see my back story is not going to be the cover of my book.

I will not allow my past life to keep me trapped on bloodied hooks.



This is me

T

Age: 14

This is me:

I sit at the window and watch them go by. They shout and they giggle, they laugh and they cry.

Behind all this glass, I am not in this world my hands round my tea cup are tightly curled and what's so bizarre is when I step out and go through that door I am stricken with doubt because though I am sure I have gone into the day I have never felt so far away.

I stare at the wall its smooth white unbroken, but under the surface there are ugly lumpy hard edged and cement holding them in place making sure the wall doesn't fall down.

So the smooth, white unbroken-ness is not the whole wall. People like smooth white unbroken things, as long as you don't show them what is underneath.

This is me:

watch

I sit at the window and watch them go by. They shout and they giggle, they laugh and they cry. Behind all this glass, I am not in this world my hands round my teacup are tightly curled and what's so bizarre is that when I step out and go through that door I am stricken with doubt because though I am sure I have gone into the day and I have never felt so far away... I Stare at the wall its smooth white & unbroken, but under the surface there are ugly, lumpy hard edged and cement holding them in place making sure the wall doesn't fall down. So the smooth, white unbroken-ness is not the whole wall. people like smooth white unbroken things as long as you don't show them what is underneath.



Me! Carla Age: 11

Commended

Chorus

Me-ee!
I am called Carla.
I get anxious now and again.
So you can call me what you wanna.
I don't really care.

Intro

A girl that loves gaming,
a smiley one too.
I'll never stop it,
I just won't listen to what you say-ayy.

Sometimes I'm a bit shy,
but baby I know I'm brave.
Now, shall we get started?

Verse

People have too many expectations with their conversations,
they chit chat too much.
I walk and talk at the same time.
I listen to music on my headphones.

I won't stop the beat.
I know
Gotta trust me.
when we go through things.

Chorus

Me-ee!
I am called Carla.
I get anxious now and again.
So you can call me what you wanna.
I don't really care.

Verse

If it doesn't make sense, I will repeat myself.
I don't really mind, just watch me.
Look again and say my name, when you're in trouble and I'll come straight away.

Just trust me.

Believe me.
You may think I'm a liar,
but I ain't!

Just trust me.
Believe me.
I make promises come true.

Chorus

Me-ee!
I am called Carla.
I get anxious now and again.
So you can call me what you wanna.
I don't really care.

Verse

Looking at me now.
Didn't I tell ya before?
Isn't that right?
Are ya tryin' hard enough?

Remember me eventually,
starin' right at me/
Does anyone try?

Ending

I am called Carla,
I get anxious now and again.
And this is me!

This is me (song)

Lilly

Age: 13

I look in the mirror, and what do I see?
I see a girl standing in front of me.
Your words cut deeper than a knife and,
you tell me what is my life.

Well let me tell you all something,
you guys don't know nothing,
yeah, you guys don't know what's inside.
You guys sit back and tell me,
yeah, you guys sit back and tell me, who I am.

This is me:
I'm a daughter, I'm a sister, I'm a writer and a
listener.
I'm an aunty and I got lots of feelings inside.
I love TV, I wanna go into acting, and I am so
much more, not just that annoying girl that you
don't truly know.

Mostly school is hardest,
People shouting get lost and,
Making you feel like you ain't enough.
And you did that to me good.

Well let me tell you all something,
you guys don't know nothing,
yeah, you guys don't know what's inside.
You guys sit back and tell me,
yeah, you guys sit back and tell me, who I am.



Third Place

This is me:
I'm a friend,
I'm a secret keeper,
I love art, drama and music,
may wanna pursue it later,
and I'm learning how to play guitar.
I'll admit I haven't always done my best,
did some stupid things that have gotten me
into a mess, and its rather hard to stop
doing wrong.

People still tell me who I am.
Think and say, "Wow what an idiotic piece
of trash"
and I usually say something back.
I'm a religious believer,
I go to church, pray and live for Jesus,
and a lot of the time life can be too much.

Sticks and stones may break my bones as
well as the hurtful words,
but when someone says I'm good it makes
me feel warm inside,
and for a second, I'm not effected by the
bad.

I'm a thirteen-year-old girl,
living in a light and dark world,
silently crying out.
One day I have a dream,
that I can be the best version of me,
and do my best in my life.

May the sun come out tomorrow,
Behind the dark, gloomy clouds of sorrow,
and shine over our lives.
There is always a trace of hope,
for me, you and the rest of the world,
So we can sing, laugh and dance again.
Now we can all finally see,
who we are meant to be, and we can all
say:
This is me.



Commended

Who do you think you are?

Anton

Age: 13

It really annoys me when people say who do you think you are? If only they let me speak.

I'm a student with good grades, so, no problems getting a good career, hopefully a mathematician, or maybe an engineer, If only they let me speak.

I'm brainy where maths is such a light breeze, I add, take and calculate in my head, I revise and recite, then count until I fall asleep in bed, If only they let me speak.

I'm a writer with great words, typing, pen or pencil, I start creating, adjectives, verbs, nouns and rhymes, the stories become exciting, If only they let me speak.

I'm known as a bookworm, under the tree, behind a closed door, that's where you'll find me, horror, mystery, adventure, oh so many more to explore, If only they let me speak.

I'm the best Xbox player, I grasp the logics and swift through the games, I quickly complete all the levels, and before you know it, I'm in the hall of fame, If only they let me speak.

I'm very active in sports, I'm always ready to train, I run and run until no more, as they say, no pain no gain, If only they let me speak.

I'm a skilled footballer, with eyes on the goal, I tackle, defend, save and score, making sure I'm in control, If only they let me speak.

I'm a BMX biker, doing lots of tricks, after hours and hours of practice, a wheelie with one hand, I go so quick, If only they let me speak.

I'm a pupil with an artistic flair, I can draw and paint like a pro, If you tell me to stop drawing, I'll probably say no, If only they let me speak.

I'm a kind and considerate individual, looking out for others I do indeed, It doesn't cost anything, just kindness, I'll always help those in need, If only they let me speak.

I'm a chef with a love for food, blend and mix, oh what a delicious cake, there are spices, herbs, sauces and creams, oh, just think what I can make, If only they let me speak.

I'm a joker, people say that I'm crazy, as in funny, even when I talk and walk, I make them laugh, imagine me a comedian, I'd make lots of money, If only they let me speak.

I'm a peacemaker, I was born to love, not hate, if we could all unite, we would be in such a happy state, If only they let me speak.

So next time you ask, I hope you'll let me speak, I'll admit I'm not always right, but I guess that's just me. Each day I will try with all my might.

This is who I think I am!

This is me

Sarah

Age: 14

Past was a theme park caught in a queue til I reached the top of the slide ride where I drop I didn't have a choice

I dreamed of boats floating peacefully
Instead I was frozen with fear
I can't see the bottom
I was pushed
I didn't have a choice

Falling endlessly
Into the unknown abyss
Black hole
No escape

Then it ended

Warm loving hands helped me up
Soothed
Calmmed
Comforted me
No-one was there but them
All my troubles had gone

Then...
Torn apart
Alone again
I didn't have a choice

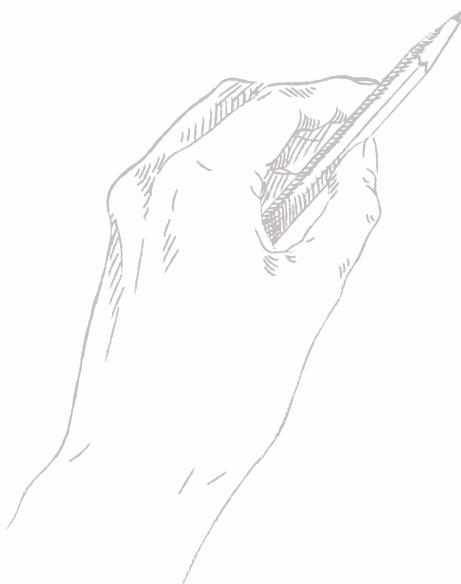
Caught on a ride
I didn't want to be on
A rollercoaster that never ended
A carousel that never stopped spinning
I didn't have a choice

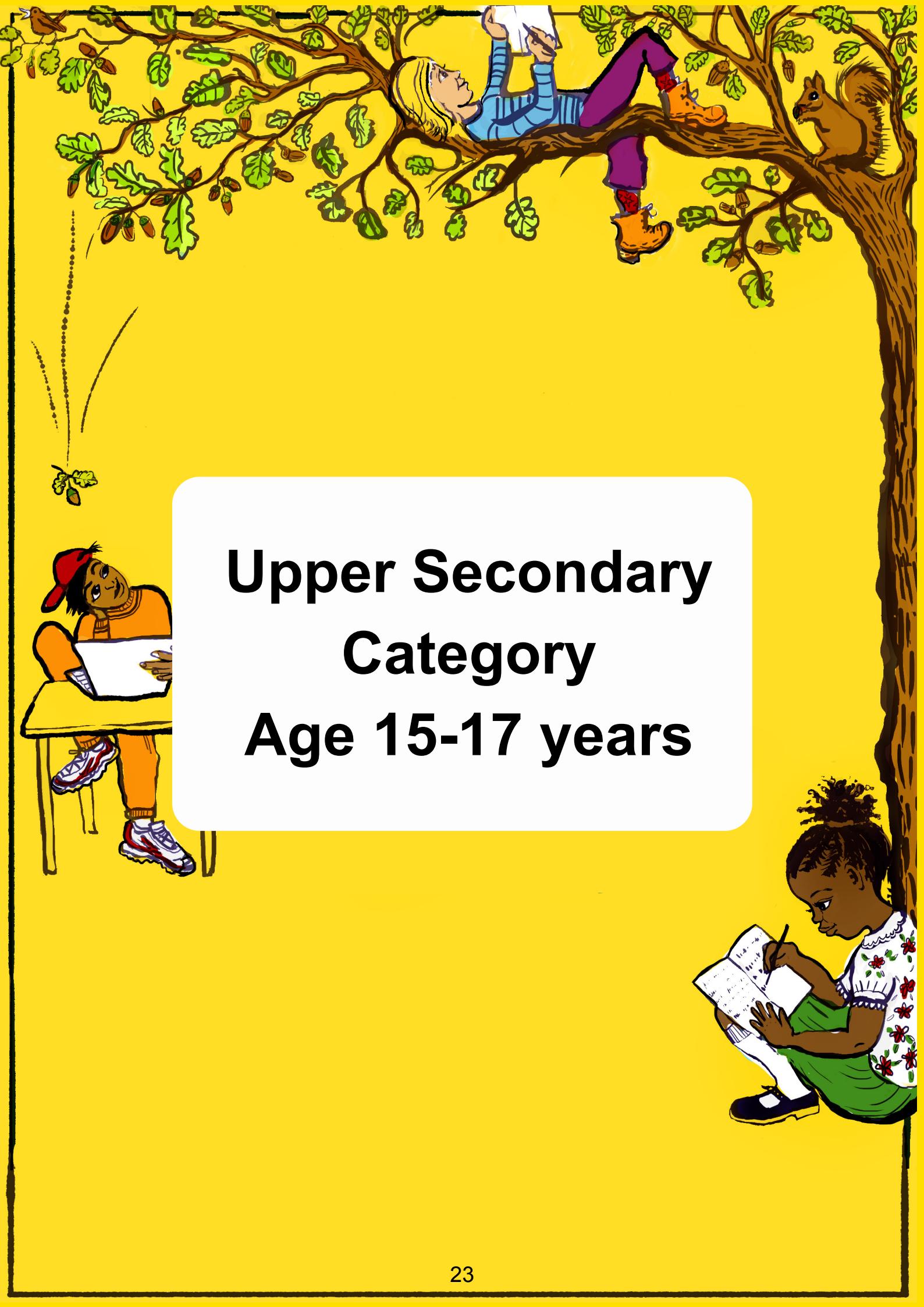
Second Place

I came off the ride with my head held high
Warm loving hands reached out for me
I'm not alone anymore

Them and Me
Family
Boats floating peacefully

I didn't have a choice
But if I did
I would choose you
Because you chose me
To be free





Upper Secondary Category Age 15-17 years

My Journey

Sebur

Age: 15

Coming here was not part of the plan
but I had to flee danger in Iran

Every day the police could take my life
every single day filled with fear and strife

You wouldn't believe the things my eyes have
seen
things that would make your soul scream

Things that you can never forget
nightmares that would make you wake up in a
sweat

Fifty-four people in just one small boat
we were worried that it would not stay afloat

No one can understand how much I was terrified
if in the next second I will even be alive

Landed in a country where everything is new
everything so different, don't know what to do

I have lost my parents, I'm filled with so much
regret
my message: please give your mother and father
respect

Commended

This is me - thoughts of me

Beverley

Age: 17

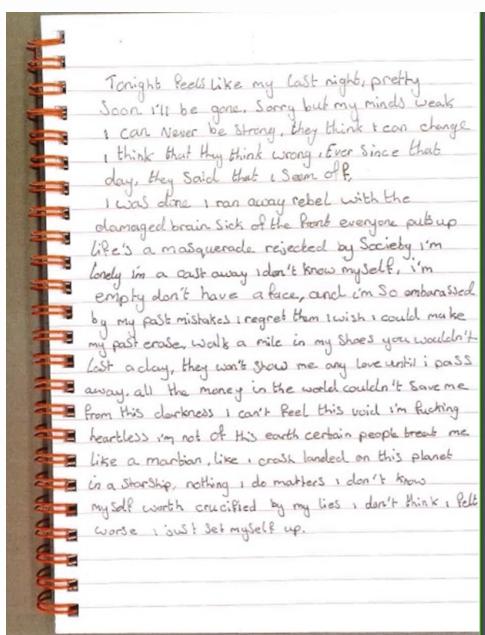
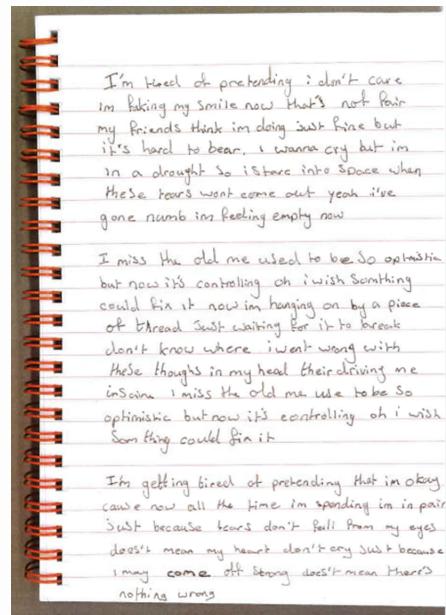
I'm tired of pretending I don't care I'm faking my smile now that's not fair my friends think I'm doing just fine but it's hard to bear. I wanna cry but I'm in a drought so I stare into space when these tears won't come out yeah I've gone numb I'm feeling empty now.

I miss the old me used to be so optimistic but now it's controlling oh I wish something could fix it. Now I'm hanging on by a piece of thread just waiting for it to break don't know where I went wrong with these thoughts in my head they're driving me insane I miss the old me used to be so optimistic but now it's controlling oh I wish something could fix it.

I'm getting tired of pretending that I'm ok cause now all the time I'm spending I'm in pain just because tears don't fall from my eyes doesn't mean my heart don't cry, just because I may come off strong doesn't mean there is nothing wrong.

Tonight feels like my last night pretty soon I'll be gone. Sorry but my mind is weak I can never be strong. They think I can change I think that they think wrong. Ever since that day, they said that I seem off.

I was done I ran away rebel with the damaged brain sick of the front everyone puts up life is a masquerade rejected by society I'm lonely I'm a cast away I don't know myself. I'm empty don't have a face and I'm so embarrassed by my past mistakes I regret them I wish I could make my past erase walk a mile in my shoes you wouldn't last a day they won't show me any love until I pass away all the money in the world couldn't save me from this darkness I can't fill this void I'm f***king heartless I'm not of this earth certain people break me like a Martian like I crash landed on this planet in a starship nothing I do matters I don't know my self-worth crucified by my lies I don't think I've felt worse I just set myself up.



Commended

This is me.

Alexis

Age: 17

I'm at this point it's get rich or go die
I promise imma make it and I do not lie

Why I'm not rich yet I keep asking myself why
and when ur feeling low u give urself a remind
yeah dis me and dis my life

And right now I don't really wanna work a 9-5
I just go work go home and get high
tryna work out the meaning of life

Age 6 mum and dad split
It was calm at first coz we were just kids

Age 11 me sis told mum we don't like dis
so she packed our clothes binbags took us to
our grandmas bit
I had phone feeling alone and it was s**t
same as sis but it is what it is

I'm pretty sure a stable family what we miss
they don't say it's that bad at least we have
somewhere to live

My sis stronger than me coz she grabbed knife
So ask us dis question do u wanna be alive

Coz at at the end of this u won't be surprised
I got a big mouth no ego and my lil sis shy

I'm at this point it's get rich or go die
I promise imma make it and I do not lie

Why I'm not rich yet I keep asking myself
and When ur feeling low u give urself a remind

But let's get back to the story

After a month my grandma said she had
enough
so she sent me back me mums

And after a month she sent me back to daddy's
mums

I was the parcel in pass the parcel

I had dreams of building a castle
I smoke more coz harmful
add a bit more weed coz calmful

Me and sis were both in a dark place
age 14 I got caught in my dumb ways
life was a blur I was treating it like a game
getting high wid olders guys at young age

Age 15 believe it or not I had no school
full trapper like some fool
getting nicked I gotta play it off cool
my E bars flashing I have no more fuel

Went back to grandmas same s**t again
police got involved now I'm living in care
me and sis scared coz we don't know how to
bare
My sister plays games on chair and me I like to
have affairs

This Is why I wanna be rich so bad
and tbh I couldn't have ask for a better life

I wanna do this for my sis my mum my dad
and the day I make it's gonna feel so right

I'm at this point it's get rich or go die
I promise imma make it and I do not lie
why I'm not rich yet i keep asking myself
and when ur feeling low u give urself a remind

Commended

Like a Phoenix

Billie

Age: 17

Like a phoenix rises from the ashes,
magnificent in its beauty,
I will rise,
glorious than ever,
stronger than before,
with wisdom beyond my years,
I am blessed with understanding,
which simultaneous saddens and angers me,
this way of the world,
I see for what it truly is,
vile and vicious,
cruel and selfish,
my rebirth promises hope,
a passion to change and challenge things,
a wise man once said;
'The flower that blooms in adversity is the most rare
and beautiful of all
and no words ever had rang more true,
For I am not going to give a way this second chance,
I am not going to let it go to waste,
coming into care is one of the hardest things i have
had to face,
yet here I stand,
because I was reborn and I rose from the ashes like
a phoenix





Third Place

Different is who I am.

Harmony

Age: 16

Who am I. I'll tell you. I'm different. I'm thick, not slim, not fat. I have curls that coil with nothing straight about their kink. And just like my hair I'm natural, beautiful and strong. I have a smile even on the darkest of days. And even on my darkest days I serve a different smile.

Because I'm different that's who I am. Different.

No difference isn't bad. It's beautiful like the tight curls that bounce and sit on my crown. Its beautiful like the rolls on my stomach and the stretch marks that keep me stretching and stretching . Its beautiful like the vitiligo on my multi - cultured skin and my crazy cackle laughter that brings joy even in the most unjoyful times. And I love me because me makes me me. Me makes people happy. Being me makes ME happy. Everyone loves ME. Who am I. Listen to me and the rhymes of my lips. I'm thick with rolls and scars and stretch marks and moles and everything that makes me who I am. And yes I may be called fat or ugly, stupid or annoying but to me I'm beautiful and I'm different. Because this is me.

I don't belong in a box:

Callum

Age: 15

Second Place

I don't belong in a box:

Society expects a 'woman' to be:

- Feminine
- Weak
- Emotional
- Hairless
- And submissive

Society expects a 'man' to be:

- Masculine
- Strong
- Logical
- Hairy
- And dominant

How come society has so many rules?

How come you and we can't live OUR lives the way WE want to live them?

See I'm nor feminine nor masculine

- I'm nor weak or strong
- I'm nor emotional or logical
- I'm nor hairless or hairy
- and nor am I submissive or dominant

I'm just me.

You might think I belong in one of these 'boxes' or categories'
but in fact I do.

I belong to the 'box' or 'category' labelled 'THIS IS ME'

Because that's what I am.

- I'm me
- nobody can tell me different.

And most importantly, NOBODY can tell YOU different.



Care Leaver Category Age 18-25 years

To me, from me

L

Age: 24

To me, from me.

You're nine when you're told
you're going into care,
the social worker arrives
and he taxi's you there.

It all feels scary
and you feel so alone,
as you stand in the doorway
of the place they call home.

You're there gripping tightly
to the only belonging you could save,
Ziggy's your safe place
and he makes you feel brave.

They teach you the basics
like care and personal hygiene,
you think they're rich and posh
because they own their own fridge and
washing machine.

You cry and you hide and you hate yourself,
for months you beg to go home.

You keep secrets firmly hidden,
because you still somehow want your mum
but you start building good memories,
you begin to settle after a while.

Eighteen months pass by
and you finally learn how to smile
then they tell you that you're moving,
they have a long-term placement ready.

Third Place

And you're back in that doorway,
gripping on to your teddy.
This time you have suitcases,
no bin bags are in sight.

But somehow that makes it harder,
and you're back to fight or flight.

They say you're rejecting and controlling,
you're anxious avoidant at its finest.

They can't understand how to help you
whilst you're fighting for survival.

There's years of struggle and hurt
as you try process the past.

You worry you're completely broken,
everything's going too slow and too fast
you pull down on your sleeves,
to hide the secrets of your story.

You're simultaneously sixteen and nine,
and the world still feels really scary.

But you end up doing amazingly well,
you go on to your degree.

You study Psychology and trauma
and begin to understand your history.

The loneliness of being a care leaver breaks
you, you hate the way you feel.

But you start to accept friends as family,
and gradually you start to heal.

Then one day you're searching for your calling,
scouring 'Indeed' for a job.

You see a role in Residential Childcare
and send your application off.

You go into working with care kids,
because you remember how it felt,
to be that scared kid in the doorway,
fighting your way out of hell.

You're doing quite well now,
you're professionally "trauma informed".

You learn ways to help your kids live,
through all that they've endured
you're no longer a care kid,
you're so resilient and strong
you fought the trauma and stereotypes,
you managed to prove them all wrong
you're grateful to social services,
because they actually saved your life.

You didn't like it at first
but now you know that they were right
every part of your story,
has changed the person you are today.

It was hard, scary, and lonely,
but now it's beginning to be okay.

You are eternally grateful
for the life that you've survived,
because it made you who you are;
you were saved at the age of nine.



This is me

Skye-Ella

Age: 23

I'm young and weird, I'm odd, that's true,
but this is me, I am not you.
I went into care at four years young,
two years had passed, the next five stung.
Those next five years were spent in despair,
with my dad in a home and a stench in the air.
He was the devil, and we was in hell.
He hurt me and my sister, now I'm eleven...
well.

From tom boy to Goth, I've found something
new, rock music is me and me is not you.

Eleven years old, now we live with my mum,
emotions confused, I'm still feeling numb.
I wish it got easier in the next few years,
unfortunately it's filled with a lot more tears.
Mum took drugs, alcohol and had bad mental
health, she took all of her pain, out on myself.

I am who I am, I'm different it's true,
I'm proud to be me because me is not you.

Only three or so years we four spent in her care,
we moved four or five times, this was not fair.
Bullies in school and another at home,
made my life hard to bare, I was feeling alone.
Depression and sadness had consumed my life,
I hated myself, why all this strife?

My words are my power, my passion the glue,
I'll hold it together for me and not you.

Second Place

Removed from my mums the four of us
gone, four sibling's three homes, but time
still goes on.

A year or so on, my mum set a fire,
her flat set alight, the smoke climbing
higher.

A week she spent in a hospital bed,
tests were done, she was brain dead.

Time was gone for us to start new,
but I will live for me, for me and for you.

From fourteen onwards in care I will stay,
new loved ones surround me so I don't go
astray.

My mum was gone but I wasn't alone,
I had a good foster family in a new home.
We had cats and fish and my guinea pig
Jack, even through all the pain, I wouldn't
go back.

Although I'm depressed I'm trying to be true,
I won't be changed, I'll never be you.

I now go to groups who work with kids in
care, we look at a system that needs a
repair.

For years these groups grew and grew,
not just one but three, who knew?
All these voices of kids just like me,
different ages and backgrounds, will you
hear our plea?

A system change is needed, now and for who?

Who is for me, for me and for you.

I'll wrap up this poem with who I choose to be,

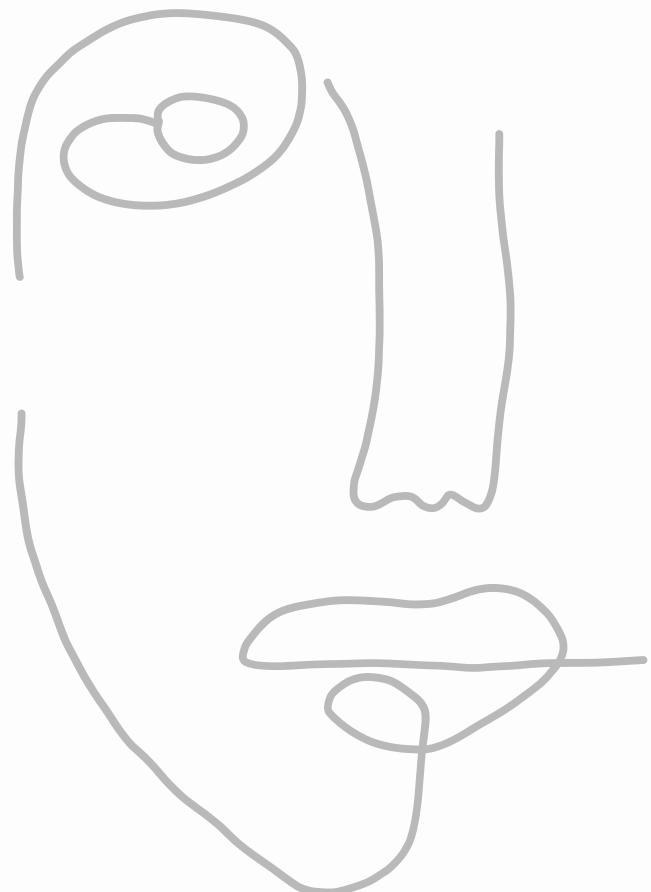
my life's just beginning, I want to be ME.

I'm 23, a decorator, a youth worker too,

I'm kind and caring, I want to help you.

I'm artsy and emotional, I love to sing but can't,

my words are my passion, I'll now end my rant.



A Voice

Erin

Age: 22

Commended

A silent whisper, not yet a voice

crying heavy tears

silence in a loud room

a mind static but screeching!!

A voice with no words

hiding behind a door, locked.

Chained down by secrets.

A child unable to say a simple no.

Manipulated.

Saying no was soul destroying!

A child full of courageous care for others.

Used and abused...

Neglected...

Childhood snatched away

leading to an innocence stolen.

Silence had a new meaning. Tears had no meaning.

That child, only sixteen, should have had a voice and been able to say no.

But no.

That child flooded herself with guilt, shame, and blame.

Reliving hurdles of gut-wrenching emotional pain that resulted in self harm and attempts to end it all.

Her abuse turned inwards.

Her skin turned into endless paper

she found a voice...

Not her exact voice.

But a voice! Warped and changed.

A false purpose, confidence, and freedom.

Alcohol was her escape, her voice... her way to 'fit in'

One thing led to another...

BANG!

Legs drop, hair back, blood... lots and lots of blood.

Shaking...



Breathe little girl...

Tears!! Fears!!

Her hands clenched tight in her hair

screaming

her voice is sore

It's hoarse

hold my hand

BANG!

HOLD IT!!

BANG!!

police sirens, an ambulance and this little girl...

Will she make it through tonight

smashed on the cold floor.

Empty packets of pills....

One, two, three... 20, 30...

Her safe place was surrounded by nurses and police.

She didn't want to do what she was doing but she thought she couldn't stop...

She wanted to hurt herself so much that the pain of everything else would pause...

Are you okay?

Yes, she says, smiling... even laughing

But once again a bottle, cigarettes and pills...

BANG!

bottle smashes

BANG!!!

SIRENS, SCREAMING, CRYING

BANG!!!

wake up little girl

doors slamming, machines beeping...

You're not alone

I hear your voice

TEARS, FEARS

lost, scared and tired

unpredictable and impulsive

BANG!!!



Unable to see her worth
unable to find a purpose
her only purpose was between her lips and the bottle
a little girl looking to find herself in inner whispers of her puppets
the clouds calling her home
BANG!!
a light shines
your home now
hold my hand
one. two. three
recover!!
BANG!!
RECOVER!!!
breathe just breathe....
Her eyes open fully
one day turns into weeks
weeks turn into months
and that little girl finds her voice
uses her voice
she is a fragile, healing delicate flower
months of laughing and crying
change and growth
ups and downs
her tears are seen, and her voice heard.
That voice that can move millions.
In a life full of trauma, neglect and addiction.
Feelings of hopelessness and despair can turn into hope and repair.
A found purpose, a love for learning and
sharing her story!
A drastic and unimaginable turn around
BANG!!
SHE'S A YEAR SOBER!
SHE LOVED, WORTHY AND SHE'S GOT THE BIGGEST, BOLDEST, BRIGHTEST VOICE!!
SHE IS STRONG!
SHE IS ME!



Commended

This Is Me

Kirstie

Age: 23

There once was a girl, who was without a home, she had a house but was completely alone, she had a family but she was a stranger maybe, had they looked, they'd have seen the danger they saw her defiance.

As a child acting out, they never took the time to see what she was about, and when she grew opinions and voice, they took her home and left her without choice.

In a lonely hostel with no one who cared, facing the world, unprepared, rejected by the ones she loved by life's cruel hands, constantly shoved.

She cried and cried, she died inside, she threw a fit and closed her eyes, desolate and dark is the world she knows, but blindly into the darkness she goes.

For life had handed her an unfair deck the game was rigged, the score was set, destined to fail, expected to lose, she battled the bet, a new life, she would choose.

She brushed her hair and cleaned her teeth, battled with the emotion beneath, she stood up proud and wiped her tears, confronted all her darkest fears,

she got a home, she got a job, she got good friends to show her love, she got a pet, she got a car, she knew she was the one, who had got her this far.

She learned her worth and built herself, she left the trauma on a shelf, she saw her potential and started to fly, and she kissed the old her goodbye.

I think this much is plain to see,
I am her and she is me,
and I am happier than I have even been,
I am her and this is me!

This is me...

A

Age: 18

I've been through so much pain, but I didn't know that I was hurting.

All these bad decisions, because my vision was uncertain.

Lonely in my cell, but I can't see it as a burden, I just put it down too all the pain I've given, now I'm deserving.

I blame it on myself, I guess I'm tired of blaming you, unaccepting the truth was just the easy thing to do.

And i know that cause you love me, you always will forgive me. But I've worn out all the chances that you gave me it's a pity.

Alone with all the silence, sick and tried with no virus. And my mind sets tired, always rhyming bout my violence, n at the bottom where my life is, you can see it in my eye lids.

Just a bunch of little minors playing run outs with the sirens.

Looking at these walls, thinking how I played the fool, but you never value time when you're young and breaking rules. Like I'm way too cool, 13 f school. And my mother tried to show me, but I thought I knew it all. Now I'm 18, looking back, d*m that went fast. Feels like just the other day, I was sitting in my class. Wasn't thinking about my future, now I'm writing about my past. Never listen to the tutor, always came in class last. Now I'm last place, at one point d*m I was 1st. But I know it's better than me laying in a hurst !

Turn this pain to reverse, n all the ashes that emerged, and when they hit me with the bird, I thought this blessing was a curse. But the one thing for real, make mistakes, you better learn. The first time stings, but the second time burns.

And the world still turns, whilst my case gets adjourned. But you try n stay firm is the only concern.

And my life had to change, cause it aint about me. My sister writing letters, I can't even see.

Be real with yourself, cause your freedom aint free. The long way n the sweat. The short cut makes you bleed.

The hard head never hears, till they break your mind.

Think you see s**t clear, but the blind lead the blind.

When you step between tracks, better take your time.

Little youngen on them steps, like I'm gonna take what's mine.

And that's big facts, no cap. If I could I would go back.

Use to show love, but love never got shown back.

Throwback, in n out flats with them old cats, old racks, use to tell me I could make it if I sold packs.



Me!

Carli

Age: 20

Some people laugh and stare but it doesn't bother me.

This is me and I'm called Carli.

Now I'm myself, true, no longer fake no matter how much fun you make.

I walk tall even though I'm small.

With my head held high, so much so I reach the sky.

I can wear a dress and heels and the rest.

It makes me feel great, I must confess.

To come out took a lot of guts.

Some people think I'm mad and I'm nuts.

I'm not scared and I don't care,

because I love my new brown straight hair.

All my clothes, jewellery and makeup too, and every little feminine thing I do putting make-up on my face sends me into outer space.

I can't tell you how I feel when I'm wearing a six-inch heel, some people I can tell look at me as if I smell and others just wish me well, some people would gladly condemn me to Hell.

But are they perfect? No they're not.

Insecurity is all they've got.

To judge, tease and ridicule, that's how they make their confidence fuel.

I walk tall, bursting with pride, I'm not ashamed, I do not hide.

Commended

If in a crowd, you do stand out.

It sends their comfort zones into doubt.

No matter if your Trans, Bi or Gay. You can't help you feel this way.

And if you feel we're doing something wrong, who are you to say?

So what if I want a husband or wife?

This is my choice, this is my life and if you make a comment on my sexuality or gender.

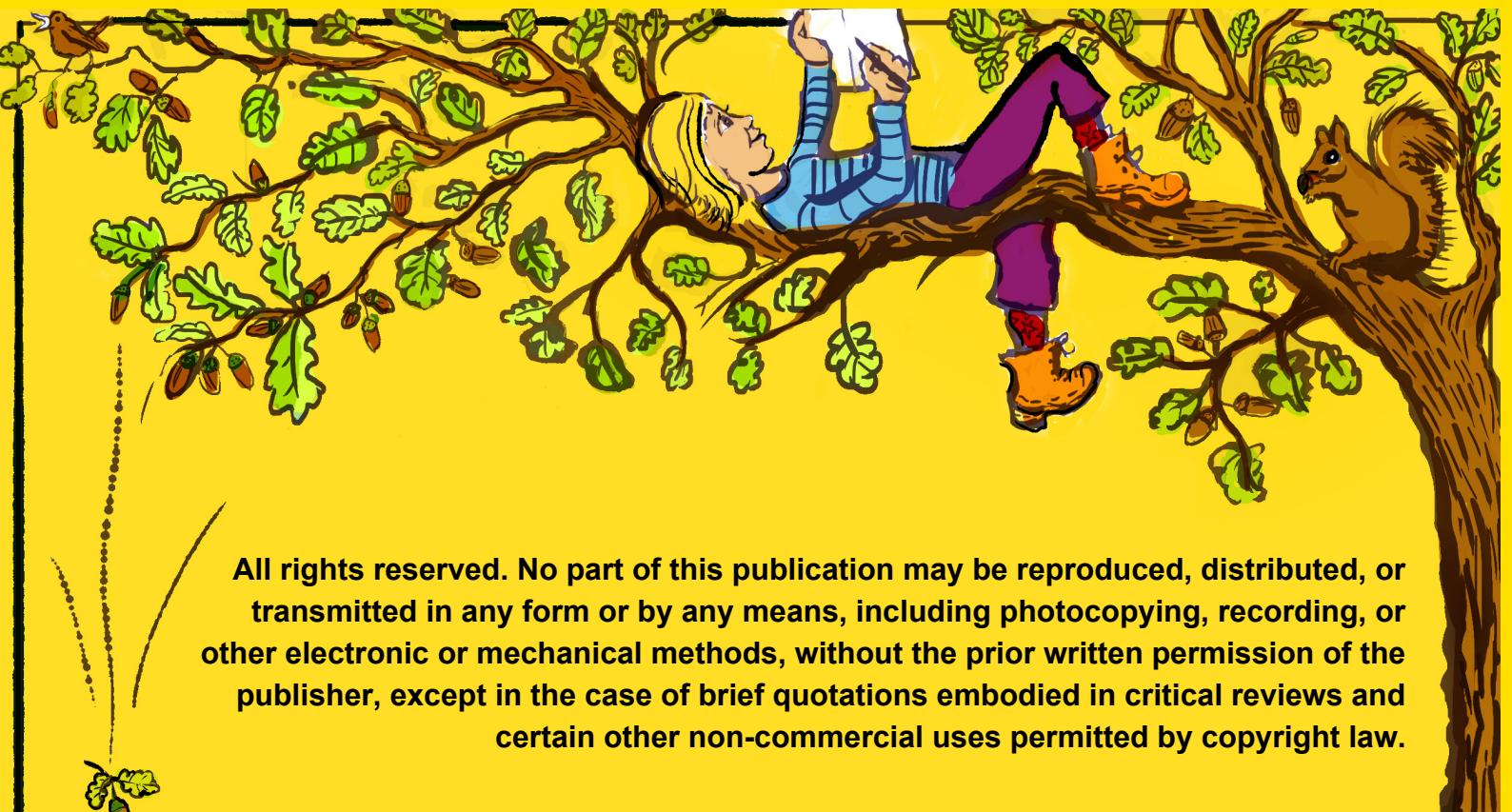
I'll just say 'return to sender'.

Your opinions, keep them to yourself you don't need to affect someone's mental health.

Because if we're not open and true to ourselves.

Our happiness will end up on the shelves.

No matter what people say
be honest and true to yourself each and every day
no matter what people's opinions might be,
I'll still be Carli and this is me.



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getting young voices heard

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