



Artwork by Saara aged 10

Voices 2024

Shortlisted Entries from Voices 2024:
The Creative Writing Competition for
Children in Care and Care Leavers

On the theme:

What makes me different?

Thank you to...

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

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

Claire Wilden, for hosting this year's competition with Peter Capaldi.

Patrice Lawrence, Emma Norry, Chris Wild, Callen Martin, Abi Elphinstone, Jordan Morgan, Rebekah Pierre, and Deborah Maclaren for being our amazing competition judges.

Courtney, Sarah, Carla and Bailey for being our brilliant young judges.

Thank you to the **St. Giles Hotel** for kindly providing hotel accommodation to some of our guests.

A huge thank you to **Madlug** for the donation of their beautiful bags for all the shortlisted entrants. Thank you to all other amazing prize donors.

Thank you to all the children and young people who entered this year's competition. Well done to everyone who took part, once again the standard of entries has been excellent.

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.

Thank you to **Saara** for the brilliant artwork used on the front cover.

A message from Coram Voice...

Brigid Robinson, Managing Director at Coram Voice...

Welcome to our Voices 2024 writing competition. I am delighted to introduce the shortlisted entries for our competition. We launched this competition in 2016 to celebrate the immense talent and creativity of care-experienced children and young people. What we did not know was the huge difference that taking part makes. 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.

I have had the absolute pleasure of reading the competition entries for this year and seeing 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.



Meet the Hosts

Peter Capaldi

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

Peter said: "I'm delighted to be hosting the Voices 2024 awards ceremony alongside one of the competition's former winners, Claire. I've been proud to support the competition for many years, and it's always an honour to meet the young writers, hear their stories and celebrate their achievements.



"I'm always blown away by the talent of all the children and young people who take part and I can't wait to meet this year's finalists!"

Claire Wilden

"When I first entered the Voices competition, I was a nervous young person who had just gone into care and needed an outlet. After five years of entering and not being shortlisted, I won the Voices competition in 2020. The next year, I became a young judge, which was an incredible experience. And this year, I'm delighted to have the opportunity to co-host the awards alongside Peter Capaldi."



Meet the Judges

Patrice Lawrence

Young adult author. Patrice has more than 20 years' experience working for charities that support equality and social justice, which are the underlying themes for most of her stories.



Emma Norry

Care-experienced author, for adults and children. Emma's books are often exploring difficult issues and complex characters in a realistic contemporary and accessible style.



Chris Wild

Care-experienced author. Chris's books draw upon his own experiences of growing up in the care system, alongside his eye-opening experiences of working in the system later in life. He is passionate about taking action to change what has been a failing system for so many children.



Callen Martin

Callen reads for publishing houses that specialise in children's and young adult fiction. Callen was the first care leaver in the history of East Sussex to study at post-graduate level.



Meet the Judges

Abi Elphinstone

Not only a children's author, but Abi is also a volunteer for Coram Beanstalk (reading support in schools)! Abi has also worked as a school teacher across the world.



Jordan Morgan

Director of Programmes at the conflict-resolution NGO 'Forward Thinking'. Jordan has worked at the highest level of politics across the world, and has relatable experience in frontline mediation and negotiation.



Rebekah Pierre

Care-experienced social worker, activist and author. Rebekah has written extensively about the care system, being featured in The Guardian, The Independent, and Radio 4.



Deborah Maclaren

Chief Executive of the organisation LoveReading and LoveReading4Kids. The organisation is driven to encourage more reading in schools for children, and each purchase donates 25% to a school in need.



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PRIMARY CATEGORY

PRIMARY CATEGORY

Sheru the Lion

Sheru, Age 5

Third Place

Hi am Sheru
Nice to meet you
How do you do?
I am nearly 6
I am full of tricks
I make everyone happy
wherever I be
I love sunshine
I like to glow
I love the winter
And love the snow
My birthday is
on new years day
Lots of presents
coming my way
I am good at everything
I always work hard
And my teachers say
I am a super STAR!!!
I love my family
They all love me
We love going on travels
To cities
And the sea
My favourite colour
Is sparkly blue
If you love me
Then I love you!!!

PRIMARY CATEGORY

Different?

Mali, Age 8

Winner

In the tapestry of life, a patchwork quilt,
I find my place, in hues of guilt.

Different, they say, for reasons galore,
Yet within, a spirit, resilient, and more.

Adopted, my tale begins, a journey unknown,
A heart, not birth, but love has sown.

Two dads, my guardians, proud and strong,
In their love, I find where I belong.

Short in stature, but tall in might,
A scar on my lip, a mark of a fight.

Age eight, I stumbled, kissed the ground,
Yet rose again, a strength unbound.

Crooked teeth, a testament to play,
At seven, I lost them, they paved my way.

Ginger hair, a flame that does ignite,
A beacon of difference, in the moon's soft light.

A girl, they say, in a world unfair,
Unequal treatment, a cross to bear.

When they jest, "so gay," my heart does ache,
For my dads, love's bond, they underestimate.

PRIMARY CATEGORY

Different?

At three, like Matilda, I read with glee,
A world of wonder, a gift in me.

Two languages dance upon my tongue,
A symphony of voices, young and unsung.

Vegan by choice, compassion my guide,
In a world of choices, where love resides.

Yet in school's gaze, a lack of insight, to trauma's
whispers, they turn a blind sight.

Care experienced, a label I wear,
In the statistics, a burden to bear.

Lower outcomes, they predict and decree,
But within me, a spirit wild and free.

Different, they say, with a scornful glance,
Yet in my heart, I find my dance.

For in these quirks, in these details of me,
Lies a symphony of strength, a tapestry.

A girl with scars and crooked smiles,
A tale of triumph, of endless miles.

Adopted, different, short, they say,
In my uniqueness, I find my way.

So let them judge, let them misunderstand,
For in my heart, a strength so grand.

I am different, a melody untold,
In my story, a brilliance unfolds.

PRIMARY CATEGORY

My Scars Make Me Different

Axl, Age 9

Commended

The scars on my face make me different,
No-one will have the same scars on their face.

Do you think they will?
I have one on my right eye, in the corner,
can you see it?

There was a diagonal gate that I thought I could run through
But I couldn't.

There was lots of blood.

My Mum put a tissue on it
And I went back off to play.

I had stitches in my right eyebrow too,
I fell on concrete
And then I did the same thing the next day.

And the next day after that.

I have a scar on my left eye too.
I fell over about two years ago.
I would have been seven then.

I have a scar on my arm too,
I tried to spin around on a 'Fliker',
That's a scooter with three wheels,
Where you wobble from side to side.

PRIMARY CATEGORY

My Scars Make Me Different

I went over a rock
And a stone stuck in my arm.
I yanked it out.
It weren't very pretty.
My mum has a video of it
But I don't want to see it again.
Because it's ugly.

Another time, I tried to do tail whip on a scooter
But my face hit the rail at the skate park.
I smacked my jaw and broke half of my tooth.
I went to the dentist to have the rest taken out
But they didn't use enough numbing cream.
I felt like hitting the dentist
But thank the Gods I didn't -
I would have been banned from there forever.

Don't do what I did.
It hurts!

But at least I am different from everyone else!

PRIMARY CATEGORY

What Makes me Different?

Grace, Age 9

Commended

Did you know that Amelia Earhart's last words were "gas is running low" before her plane disappeared? Did you know she was the first woman to fly across the Atlantic alone? I did, because I love history and books and that is one of the things that makes me different.

Another thing that makes me different is my imagination. It helps me write my own books and poems. Just recently I wrote "The Minister's Hat" which was all about a stolen hat!!! Don't worry the hat was found by the detective.

The fact that I sing Christmas songs in Summer might be a bit strange but I still like it. My favourite Christmas song is Rocking Around the Christmas Tree. Sometimes me and my mummy make up our own car songs to the tune of Rocking Around the Christmas Tree.

Living with my Aunty and Uncle and Cousins doesn't mean I would be doing anything different because I am my own person. Like how I say bing-bong when the doorbell goes instead of ding-dong.

I also love to play football. Not everyone does but I do. I like playing as a midfielder. One time I got "player of the week" and I got a certificate.

When I grow up I want to be in government and make up rules that will make the planet a better place. Like having an electronic-free day and giving money to the homeless and having enough houses for everybody and having lots of green space and parks and forests for animals. I don't know anyone else my age or older that wants to be in government when they grow up and that makes me different.

PRIMARY CATEGORY

What Makes me Different?

I like to ask people about themselves. I like asking people questions like "do you like lemons?" and "do you like history?" and "do you know who Mary Queen of Scots is?" and "why do people do the things that they do?"
Though nobody has ever really answered that question.

PRIMARY CATEGORY

My Story by J

Jayden, Age 10

Second Place

Life at the moment is hard, probably like most people with tears and fears running through my head. How can we solve this?

It started way back when my dad started treating me bad, I was about three hiding under the Christmas tree. Playing hide and seek, my nerves were on edge, was I bound to be found?

Moving on two years and I was five... The very next day we had some school, don't talk about it because it was a massive drool.

I waited for my parents to come pick me up, they never came, but someone else did, a woman, she was a stranger to me, I was filled with dread, like I'd been risen from the dead. She was nice and she liked to roll the dice. She took me to a different family, they were kind. They said hello. I said how did you know I needed a toothbrush? I had my own space to use my pace and did whatever I pleased.

The next day they organised school I missed my friends I made some new ones, I felt kind of nervous at first but I began to feel welcome and I burst. There was a little girl who had been lonely was the same age as me she acted weird at first but we became friends and even eventually we called each other siblings. I started saving up for a brand new Xbox my foster carer had an Xbox one I really liked it as I played my games.

The girl I was talking about aged about five back then same age as me we grew up together and had lots of fun but come on we weren't that dumb. There's been ups and downs and falling out but we always have been there for 1 another.

PRIMARY CATEGORY

My Story by J

Moving on to when I was eight I felt settled and began to feel welcome and not to lie I started to love them and felt like home. Ok coming to the present day it's been a rocky road as I started to feel they don't care for me anymore but I did hurt them so it's understandable but deep down they do. So now it's time to make things right.

PRIMARY CATEGORY

8 Things About Me

Darcy, Age 10

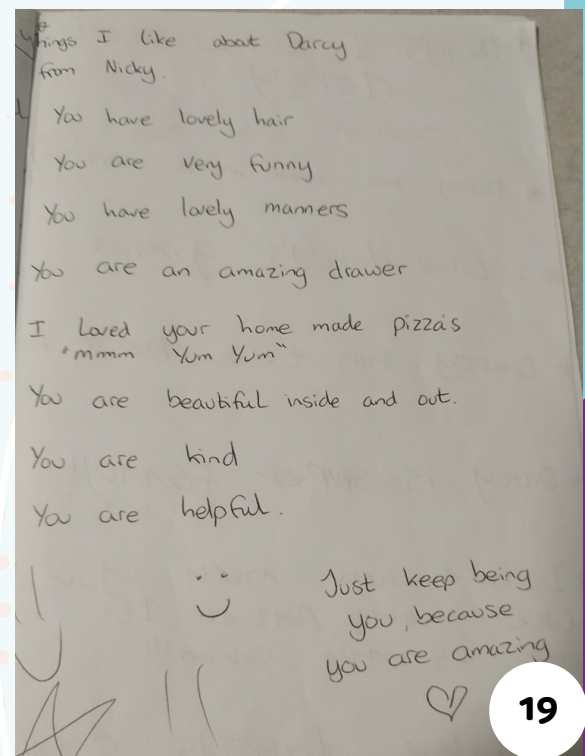
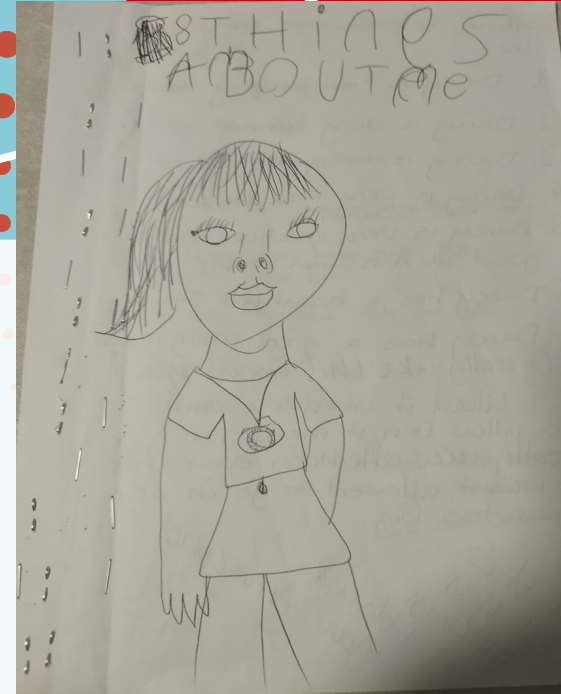
Commended

People write 8 things about me:

1. Darcy is fun to play with
2. Darcy is very funny
3. Darcy is smart
4. Darcy is a very nice person to be around
5. Darcy is very creative and good at arts and crafts
6. Darcy has a beautiful smile
7. Darcy has a great imagination (I really like this about you)
8. I liked it when we built a pillow den it made for a really nice afternoon even when I wasn't allowed to go in as I was too big.
9. Be the best you always as I think you're amazing.

1. You have lovely hair
2. You are very funny
3. You have lovely manners
4. You are an amazing drawer
5. I loved your home made pizzas 'mmm yum yum'
6. You are beautiful inside and out
7. You are kind
8. You are helpful

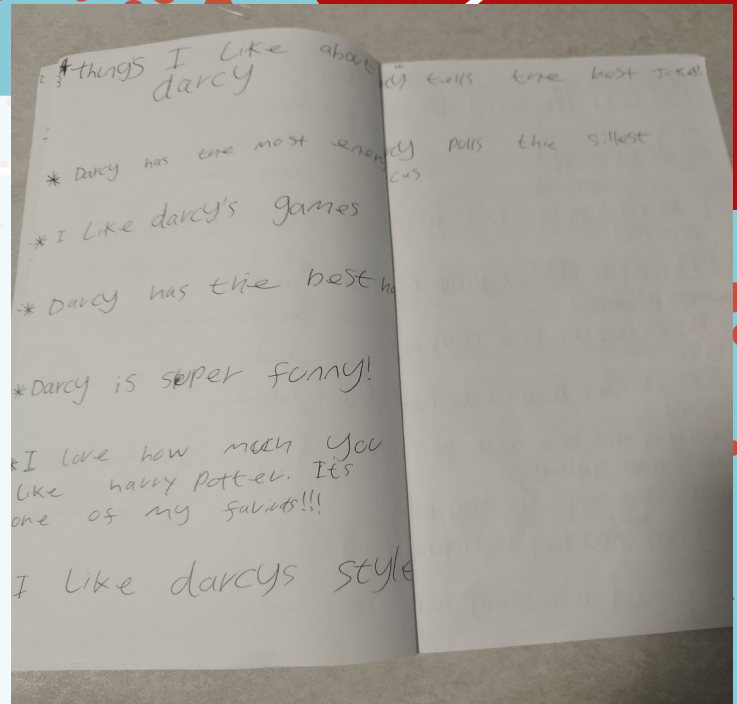
Just keep being you, because you are amazing.



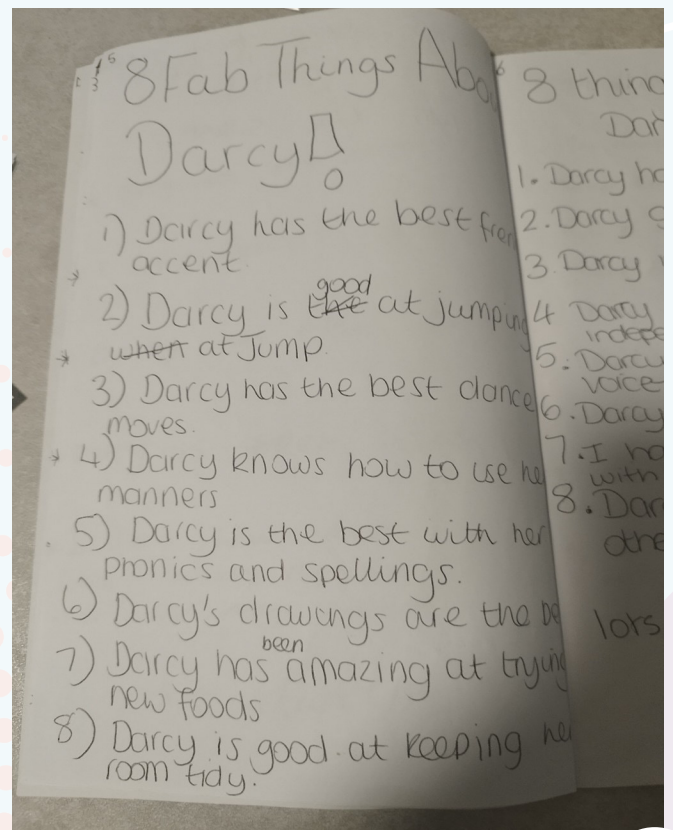
PRIMARY CATEGORY

8 Things About Me

1. Darcy has the most energy and pulls the silliest faces
2. I like Darcy's games
3. Darcy is the best
4. Darcy is super funny!
5. I love how much you like Harry Potter. It's one of my favourites!!
6. I like Darcy's style



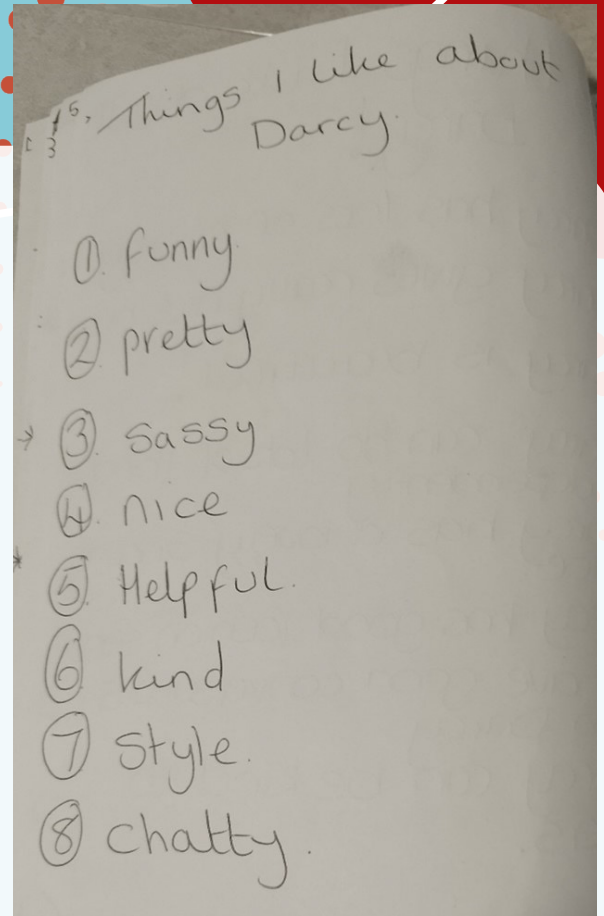
1. Darcy has the best French accent
2. Darcy is good at jumping at jump
3. Darcy has the best dance moves
4. Darcy knows how to use her manners
5. Darcy is the best with her phonics and spellings
6. Darcy's drawings are the best
7. Darcy has been amazing at trying new foods
8. Darcy is good at keeping her room tidy



PRIMARY CATEGORY

8 Things About Me

1. You always want to have fun
2. You're cheeky, in a good way
3. Full of energy
4. Cute smile
5. Easy to talk to
6. Good company on long drives
7. Your unique style
8. You listen well when you make mistakes
9. Do I have to stop? I have millions



1. Funny
2. Pretty
3. Sassy
4. Nice
5. Helpful
6. Kind
7. Style
8. Chatty

1. Darcy has lots of energy
2. Darcy gives me really nice hugs
3. Darcy is beautiful!
4. Darcy can do lots of things independently
5. Darcy has a lovely singing voice
6. Darcy has good fashion sense
7. I have good conversations with Darcy
8. Darcy can be kind to others



LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different

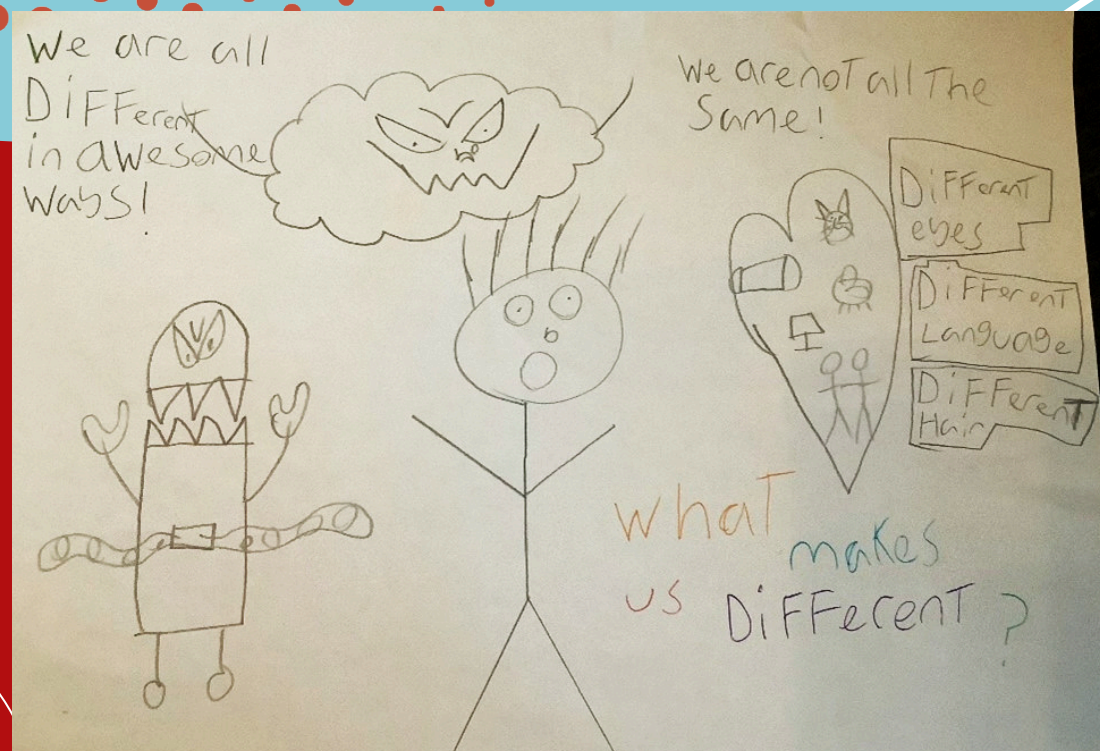
Kayden, Age 11

Third Place

What makes me different???

I have an evil brain that makes monsters that eat me every 1 second and makes imaginary bad guys that I don't like but not all is bad. I have a good heart that protects what I love and if my brain comes near it then my heart will stop my brain from hurting my heart. So the stuff I love is... tv, animals, the Nintendo Switch and my family.

I hope my brain stops being so mean. What makes me so different is everybody has a good brain but I don't, I have monsters that eat me every 1 second and they don't. Not everyone is the same we all agree we all act differently even I agreed.



LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

About Me

Hope, Age 13

Commended

What makes me different?

What makes me different?

What makes me 'me'?

Is it how I dress?

Or my history?

Is it my personality?

What makes me special?

What makes me kind

Is it what's behind my eyes?

Or what's in my mind?

Is it the frames of my glasses?

Or what's under the ashes?

What makes me 'me'?

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Unique?

Lydia, Age 14

Commended

I am a caring person at heart, but also I have a scaring temper.

I was brought up into a slum up-bringing but that does not make me who I am.

I'm driven with determination to succeed in what we call a world, however the more I get torn I come out stronger and even brighter.

I have an excellent sense of humour.

I have a purpose in life and God granted me with this precious gift.

I cannot be broken, something in me has awoken.

I always get back up, I'm not weak - and that is why I am unique.

I have a desire for fitness, the gym keeps me going and squashes all of my problems, there is no other way I can solve them.

No one can step in to my shoes, if you do you will refuse.

My name is Lydia and no one can take my name.

Behind my name lies risk assessments and information about me on a piece of paper.

Being in secure and care has made me some-what greater.

The scars that embeds into my skin reminds me of the pain I hold within.

I AM UNIQUE AND NO ONE CAN TELL ME DIFFERENT.

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different?

Louisa, Age 14

Commended

"What makes me different?" is typically what most people think. Particularly people in our current situation - people who have suffered beyond normal comprehension. As I sit here, book in hand, that same phrase refuses to leave my mind.

Perhaps it's the scars down my arms, or how my eyes look - it doesn't really matter though, because I won't even know how a "normal" person will perceive me as. Perhaps I'm not even viewed as a normal person, maybe even a monster. But I will never know.

A sigh escapes my lips as my eyes continue to scan around the small portion of the world I can distinguish through the grubby miniature window. 'They better clean this soon' I can't help but think to myself as I flop backwards onto the comforting softness of my bed-my book ending up next to my head.

My eyes stare at the grey ceiling above me - a void filling my mind as my eyes shift to my left arm, silver and red lines decorating the skin beneath - some new and some old. Suddenly the void is filled with an overwhelming feeling of regret and sadness as tears prick the corners of my eyes.

'What have I done?' 'Why do I do this?' 'I know people are ashamed of me.'

'Maybe it would be better if-'

Three loud knocks interrupt my line of thought as a soft voice calls out "AXXX, are you ok? You've been awfully quiet in there. I'm coming in." the sound of a keys rattling fills the air.

S***.

I quickly sit up and pull my jumper's sleeves down as the door opens - and squinting my eyes as bright light fills my vision I see S****- my case manager.

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different?

"Yeah, I'm fine, just been thinking about things." "What like?" "Oh just things." I say in reply, smiling. 'If I told her she'd kill me. God knows what would happen. Hell, I might be put on one to one. Or worse. Or - '

"Well, me and the others were just thinking about going on a walk around the park, they wondered if you would like to come along as well?" 'It would clear my head..' "Yeah, sure! Just let me get my bag!" she nods before shutting the door. As I get up I feel the plush carpet under my feet, I begin to put my boots on when suddenly a memory forces itself to the centre of my mind. I stand paralysed for a second from the sudden assault.

Tears begin to stream down my face once more as my breathing comes jagged. I quickly make my way to my door as I sling my bag over my shoulder and use my sleeve to wipe away the stray tears.

'It was years ago, so why am I getting this emotional? We were kids back then anyway, I'm sure they've changed since then.' 'I bet they haven't. Maybe they were right. Maybe I should really - '

"Stop." tears beginning to prick my eyes

'What makes me different...

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

You Shape You

Harry, Age 14

Second Place

Life is full of pain and hope. It can hurt at times but that doesn't change who you are. It isn't who you are inside or out. People might disagree but that is their opinion. I personally have been through a lot of hardships. My life is like a lemon. It is sometimes sweet and sometimes sour. I have lost my brother to cancer but I haven't changed. I was sad and angry when he died but now I am not. I just remember the fun we had and that he is no longer in pain but laughing and dancing up above.

What makes you different isn't your experiences. Like how I have been taken into foster care and I am proud of it. I was very young when I went into foster care but I didn't get sad. I didn't decide that I was going to be trouble or a bully. I decided to be who I am as you decide who you are. It is your choices that make you different and it is up to you if you want to change. You decide what to focus on and the emotions that you hold on to. I personally just decided to be happy and joyful and remember all that has happened to me with a smile and just to remember the good times over the bad, the fun times over the sad. This is what makes me different and what makes you different too. You might believe that you can't help who you are but you can be who you want to be.

If you decide that you want something you try your hardest and all of your focus goes to getting to your goal because dreams and everything that makes you happy is who you are. What makes you different from everyone else is even when you are knocked down you have to find the ability to stand back up even in the hardest of times because you are the one who decides when you are done and you are the one that shapes your future nothing can make you change who you are - only you can.

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

You Shape You

If you decide that life is painful then you are going to feel pain but if you think that life can be fun it will be. Your imagination and your thoughts are the strongest thing in the world. Do you think that Einstein woke up one morning as a genius? No he didn't, he worked hard and thanks to him working so hard to be who he wanted to be, he became someone that even to this day we look back at his work for inspiration and for knowledge.

So even if the world seems dark and hopeless (trust me I know), just remember it takes the strong to find the light in the dark and the weak will sink in self doubt.

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different

Jessica, Age 14

Highly Commended

I never would have thought this would have happened to me,
But it did unfortunately,
What did I do to deserve the affliction and torment I got,
Every argument, every word felt like I'd been shot,
As my life passed by, I accepted what they did,
But still, what did I do, I was just a scared kid,
Several slow years passed me by,
For several slow years they watched me cry,
What felt like forever,
Was ever so clever,
For that forever was just 7 years,
7 years of facing my fears,
7 years of living in fear,
Wishing for help to just appear,
Holding my breath not saying a word,
Hoping that my screams for help would be heard,
Living with all that dread and pain,
Along with all the qualities you gain,
You become a twin, an identical, a corresponding beast,
The actions, personality, nature of this thing I became,
All the goodness inside me went up in one flame,
For it had shrivelled to nothing like my imagination,
Therefore I sat in my room not making conversation,
Isolating myself from everyone,
Draining myself of any fun,
My friends didn't understand and just told me not to worry,
Walking home at a slow pace they would tell me to hurry,

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different

'Don't you want to go home' they ask,
'Go home', go home to the monsters behind a mask,
Hiding their true colours,
The only thing pulling me in was my brothers,
If only everyone else saw the people we did,
It wouldn't be like drowning in acid,
It was like everyday they would add a cup more,
As if what they did wasn't enough,
And I knew me and my brothers weren't that tough,
They'd say 'Home is a safe place',
But for me it was a hell hole in which I couldn't erase,
It was like a zoo in which the animals would continuously chase,
I'd run upstairs to my room and block the door with everything I could move,
They would bang and scratch on the door,
Banging and banging till knocked to the floor,
I'd glue myself in the corner of the room,
Every inch filled with gloom,
I'd look helplessly, wishing some flower would somewhere bloom,
Bringing some life into my confined tomb,
If only someone would come and rescue me,
But no one came with some special key,
Not even with a thought in their head that I wanted saving,
That I needed a nice family, a thing I'd been craving,
But what did come was a friend,
One who'd come to put this to an end,
I hugged my brothers with all my might,
And from under the door came a blinding light,
In that moment every inch of doom and gloom I had embedded inside,
Every inch was replaced with a trolley full of pride,
Then all the words are finally released,
No longer living with a fearsome beast,
Finally living with a kind mum and dad,
Having the freedom.

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

Caught in the System

Georgia, Age 13

Winner

(Verse 1)

Yo, listen up, I got a story to share,
'Bout a life that's been tough, in foster care,
Raised in uncertainty, no place to call home,
But I never let it break me, I stood strong, alone.

(Chorus)

Foster care, a journey of resilience,
Through the hardships and trials, I found my brilliance,
I'm a survivor, rising above despair,
This rap's my anthem, for all in foster care!

(Verse 2)

Caught in the system, shuffled around,
Different houses, different faces, no solid ground,
But I learned to adapt, became a chameleon,
Building walls 'round my heart, no more feeling numb.

(Pre-Chorus)

But deep inside, a burning fire grew,
Dreams and aspirations, I knew I had to pursue,
Foster care couldn't define my worth,
I had to rise up, show 'em what I'm really worth.

(Chorus)

Foster care, a journey of resilience,
Through the hardships and trials, I found my brilliance,
I'm a survivor, rising above despair,
This rap's my anthem, for all in foster care!

LOWER SECONDARY CATEGORY

Caught in the System

(Verse 3)

I met some angels, foster parents who cared,
Guided me through darkness, showed me love was there,
They opened up my eyes, to a world of possibility,
Gave me strength and hope, and helped me find stability.

(Bridge)

To all the kids in foster care, this one's for you,
You're not alone, we've all been through,
The struggles and the pain, we understand,
Together we'll rise, united we'll take a stand.

(Chorus)

Foster care, a journey of resilience,
Through the hardships and trials, I found my brilliance,
I'm a survivor, rising above despair,
This rap's my anthem, for all in foster care!

(Outro)

No matter where life takes me, I'll never forget,
The lessons learned, the bonds I've met,
Foster care shaped me, made me who I am,
And through this rap, I'll forever give a damn.



UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

Favoured Piece

Erika, Age 15

Third Place

When I was younger 'different' was a word I feared to be.
I knew that I was a distorted puzzle piece but I so dearly wanted my edges
align with the frame,
that I bent and pushed
my way in.

I wanted to be colourful and interesting like the other pieces,
that I painted my face and straightened my creases,
I had no one to draw pretty designs, but others had murals,
so I wondered why?

A girl came and opened the box,
a cold sweat started to drop.
The water washed my fresh paint away and
she too saw my different works at play.

Unexpectedly, she smiled.
She said I was her 'favoured piece',
how beguile I thought it to be,
was I truly worth the amaze or was this only but a phrase?
At the sink, the girl's warm hand helped bathe my stains away and I felt a way,
unlike a stray.

I realised that all my worries were fictitious, my mind was hazed and
I just crazed to be seen and embraced.

So now, I see my curves and charms and I do not fear, as thoughts can become
thunderous storms but the beauty returns
when you look inside and open the box.

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different?

Hoda, Age 15

Commended

In a world of puzzle pieces, you're one of a kind,
Your own special rhythm, a unique find.

Like colours in a crayon box, each shade,
Your differences make you, never to fade.

Picture a storybook with pages unturned,
Your adventures, lessons, and the wisdom earned.

No photocopies, just an original you,
A puzzle without pieces that others may view.

Imagine a dance floor where everyone sways,
But you groove in your style, in your own phase.

Not a copycat, but a rare creation,
A masterpiece formed, a unique foundation.

So, in this big world, where paths diverge,
Your uniqueness is a treasure, a vibrant surge.

Keep embracing the quirks that make you whole,
For in being yourself, you've found your role.

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

Black History 2023

Teresa, Age 16

Commended

One day my mother took me to the beach and as I got carried away in the sea I almost drowned, the salty sea water suffocating my throat, invading my eyes.

But because of that I learnt how to swim.

And just like that, I learnt how to drown into oppression, oppression suffocated my throat took away my voice blinded my eyes with tears It's black history month but this year I couldn't bring myself to write something that was glorifying, I just wanna spit some facts.

The more I grow the more I read and the more I read the more I learn and the more I learn is the more revolted I get.

My grandad always told me to be on my best behaviour because I am different, I didn't know at the time he was referring to my skin colour See we don't come from oppression but have been forced to adapt to oppression.

My grandad always said that we come from a broken system but we don't. We come from a system that was built that way to work that way to treat us that way, which makes sense as to why the majority of the population in prisons are black people.

Sometimes I don't feel free.

How can I when my own are being dehumanised elsewhere and sometimes when I lay my head on my pillow I think about Korey Wise who was sent to an adult prison at 16 for a murder he did not commit.

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

Black History 2023

I think about Latasha Harlins a 16 year old girl who was shot by a white woman over juice.

I think about Stephen Lawrence, George Floyd, Yusuf Salaam.

Say their names.

Say Kalief Browder.

They are now concrete roses.

Their blood sunk into the concrete and they became red roses
I like to think of it that way.

One day my mother took me to school.

And as I stayed there longer, I realised me and my people always got treated very differently and that's when I learnt to sing.

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different?

I lost my humanity: when I was sanctioned with a DOL order

Sari, Age 17

Second Place

You don't think about losing your humanity in the same way as losing all your belongings. Humanity is a part of you and who you are as a person. You carry it everywhere so nobody thinks it can take that away from you until it's gone. When you are stripped of your basic human rights it takes a toll on you. You are reduced to a number or a problem, you are not even a person anymore. You are what you have done, who you have become, and what you have experienced. You don't have favourite colours or interests. You lose the ability to remain human, to have logic and standards.

If you have been that way for even a short amount of time it does damage. People are social creatures; they are not meant to be kept away. So, when that happens, you lose the ability to interact. Time passes slowly, your human rights are taken away, you are not living, you are merely surviving. Your fight, flight or freeze takes over. Time isn't real anymore. You lose the ability to do basic things by choice or not.

In my experience my human rights were taken away before they legally could do that. I didn't wash myself, I didn't have clean clothing, I didn't sleep, I didn't leave the house. Even if I did I would get pinned down, I wasn't seen as a person, they knew nothing about me and they didn't care either. I was only seen and spoken about as a problem. Everyone's experience with me was a problem. I didn't have the chance to be a person. In their eyes I was not a person, I was an issue. As not what I had done, but the things that were being done to me were what caused my reactions. Obviously, this is a glimpse of my experience.

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different?

I lost my humanity: when I was sanctioned with a DOL order

As humans we are taught logic and right from wrong, what is appropriate behavior, and what is not. When you go back into that state, you can't do anything properly, or at all. You can't function. You don't care what is right and wrong. Your only instinct is to survive as you have been brought to the level of basic biology.

I've lost many things in my life but by far this is the worst. I have had to work very hard to regain my humanity and once you lose your humanity you lose your dignity. I'm embarrassed about things I have done while in that state and I'm thankful I don't remember much. That, by far, is worse because you mourn your humanity. Even when you re-find it you will never be the same and you need to learn to cope with that.

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

Tapestry of Life

Callum, Age 17

Commended

In the tapestry of my life, I stand apart,
A symphony of strength, forged by my heart.

Through challenges faced, both seen and unseen,
I find solace in what makes me unique and keen.

I am gay, a vibrant flame that brightly glows,
Embracing love's spectrum that society may oppose.

With pride and courage, I've chosen to be true,
For in authenticity, I discover breakthrough.

As a child in care, I've walked a winding road,
Navigating hardships, yet resilience bestowed.

I've faced battles unseen, that only the bravest know,
And triumphed, with strength that continues to grow.

Within my faith, as a Christian soul I abide,
Finding refuge in God's love, arms open wide.

Though some may question how my paths align,
My journey's testament, a story so divine.

In the depths of struggle, I have persevered,
Overcoming obstacles, hopes soaring, never veered.

Through moments misunderstood, and tears that flowed,
I've unearthed resilience, a hero's seed sowed.

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

Tapestry of Life

For you see, my journey holds tales untold,
Struggles only known to the depths of my soul.

Yet, from the darkness, a radiant light arose,
Guiding me forward, as my spirit freely grows.

Each aspect that sets me apart, a masterpiece,
A testament to the strength that lies beneath.

In embracing my differences, I come alive,
Igniting a fire that forever will strive.

So let us celebrate all that makes us unique,
With love and compassion, we turn the cheek.

Together we rise, united we stand,
Championing acceptance, hand in hand.

I am gay, a child in care, and Christian too,
Overcoming struggles, the world never knew.

But through resilience and grace, I have emerged,
An inspiration for others, their spirits urged.

In the tapestry of life, we weave our stories,
Woven with colours of strength and glories.

For what makes us different, is what makes us thrive,
An anthem of resilience, forever alive.

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different?

Evan, Age 17

Winner

For years I knew difference as something to fear,
To fear all the bullies and the stories I'd hear.

So I hid in a closet, hid for my life,
I closed the door shut, away from the knife.

I stayed silent in hiding, praying to know,
To know someone like me, scared of their 'home'.

The doors they stayed bolted, locked at the seams,
But a friend ripped them open, for all to come see.

When the doors were flung open, I sat there exposed,
I knew not my safety, while everyone nosed.

When she found out my secret, she was so ashamed,
Of the person I was, of the person renamed.

She told me to go, go somewhere far,
I went to another, and went in a car.

My new closet was pretty, I painted it red,
But the red was a theme, the red stained my bed.

He loved me, I know, but love could not save,
Save me from lusting, and digging my grave.

He worried and worried, then worried some more,
Then, I was in a new room, asleep on the floor.

UPPER SECONDARY CATEGORY

What Makes Me Different?

The floor was okay, and I got on my feet,
Spoke to some people, and admitted defeat.

The people went searching, for somebody new,
They searched for a while, they searched and found you.

You stood in your doorway and welcomed me in,
We sat on the sofa, you had a warm grin.

I told my hobbies, and the things that I like,
You told me about you, and about a new life.

When I came to stay, no differences were mentioned,
You saw me as a person, I felt reawakened.

You saw not my sins, you fought my depression,
You never got angry, and fought my suppression.

For years I knew difference as something to fear,
To fear all the bullies and the stories I'd hear.

But time has flown by and I'm a new person,
This new person I am, can say completely certain,
That difference is no longer something I fear,
It's something I welcome, now that I'm here.



CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

What it Means to Me to be Different...

Connor, Age 18

Commended

I'm Connor XXXX, this is my entry for Voices 2024...

This year, the theme is what makes me different? And at first, I thought this was going to be so easy! I opened my laptop, opened a word document and started typing... but that's when it hit me. That's when I realised, I had never thought about what made me different – what made me stand out from the crowd – what made me unique.

I could say I listen to rock – but so does 48% of all music fans out there.
I could say I watch anime – but so does over 100 million households.
I could say I love to read – but so does over 80% of the world's population.
That doesn't sound very different, does it?

I knew that if I was to find what truly made me stand out... I would have to know what the word different meant itself.

The word different means something that is distinct from any other one thing. So that meant I would have to find qualities about myself that almost no other person has. And as it turns out – this proved harder than I originally believed it to be.

I share my birthday with millions of other people. 7th of XXX 2005.
I have the same first name as millions of other people. Connor.
I was born in the same town as thousands of other people. XXXX.

None of this makes me different. All these are qualities I share with other people. There are certain qualities that are different from anyone else that include things such as fingerprints, DNA and my own voice...

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

What it Means to Me to be Different...

But since everyone each has different ones of these... wouldn't that make me just like them in the fact I share a difference? What I want is something that makes me truly me.

That's when I found the one thing that makes everyone truly different from each other.

And that is their journey. Their journey to how they got here today... So, this is what makes me different:

I was Born in XXX and grew up in XXX. I went to Secondary School but shortly after moved to the sunny seaside town XXX.

I grew up without great parents and ended up in care at the age of 15. Then I moved to XXX to go to an all-boys home – a change that was never foreseen.

I went to college and got a diploma in catering and made my own family. That's when I left care at age 18 – had to move back to XXX... lost some of my friends along the way.

Moved back in with my dad and step mum – we argued, fought and rowed and shortly afterwards I soon became homeless. I kept thinking to myself that this shouldn't be allowed.

I soon found my voice and spoke out. It took a while, but I found my own flat. And although it may have taken a while... I finally found out... what made me stand out.

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

Quantum Mind

April, Age 19

Second Place

You waltz through life, uncaring of how we exist.

I think as deeply as the red lines on my wrist.

Through distorted vision you perceive the world,
While I sit back and examine the unfurled.

Running fingers along a familiar scar,
We are not the same in the way that we are.

All my tragedies I neatly fold,
Tragedies which will grow old.

I see things as numbers and charts,
But express myself through music and arts.

My daydreams are so deep I begin to sink,
While everybody else unable to think,
Try to explain what seeing means to the blind
Or think like me, a field of a quantum mind.

The world of the very small,
Is not like the world we know at all.

It's a realm of waves and particles,
Where nothing is certain or predictable.

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

Quantum Mind

In quantum physics, there is no reality until we observe it with our eyes,
I try to observe this small world through laughs and cries.

There is entanglement where two particles can share a state,
Round and round an infinite figure of eight.

Even if they are far apart in space,
We are tightly packed in this human race.

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

An Ode to Myself

Tai, Age 21

Third Place

What makes me different
Is my soul within
What makes me different
Is the life I have lived
What makes me different
Is the trauma I've faced
What makes me different
Should not be commonplace
What makes me different
Is my start in life
What makes me different
Is my strife
What makes me different
Is not knowing care
What makes me different
Is thinking life is not fair
What makes me different
Is the lessons I've learnt
What makes me different
Is the love unconfirmed
What makes me different
Is the struggle to love
What makes me different
Makes trusting so hard
What makes me different
Is feeling alone

What makes me different
Is my heart is still somewhat closed
What makes me different
Is not knowing why
What makes me different
Is thinking was it I?
What makes me different
Gives me my strength
What makes me different
Is wondering where my luck went
What makes me different
Is the hand I've been dealt
What makes me different
Is thinking time not well spent
In one of these lines
you just might find
a feeling, a thought
something you've thought.
What makes me different is a rather
vague line
but in all honesty I think about it all the
time.
The reason I question, hesitate and
interrogate
The reason I wait, for the penny to drop,
is that I am always thinking will this hurt
me or not.

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

An Ode to Myself

But here is a turn in the story I tell
That what makes me different
Made me happy as well
I have something now that I didn't
before
A family that I can adore
One made of people who aren't all
the same
But a family nonetheless I can say
I take some joy to know it is mine
I take some pride even if I keep it
inside
Its not where they come from that
matters to me
But whether or not they can stand
beside me
I have these people that I can call
And unexpectedly show up at the
door
They greet me with smiles and nice
strong hugs
I often have to say your squeezing
too much
What makes me different
Is a thing of the past
What makes me different
Is knowing pain does not last
What makes me different
Is a story I tell
What makes me different
Is that I can now share

What makes me different
Is I stood steadfast with my
thoughts and the finches
What makes me different
Is I'm no longer on the fringes
What makes me different
Sets me apart from most
But what makes me different
Deep down inmost
What makes me different
Is a thing of the past
What makes me different
I will outlast

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

Broken is Beautiful

Lucas, Age 23

Commended

What makes me different?

I often ask myself what makes me so different,
From peers my age.
Is it the meetings, medication or hospital stays.
Is it the labels society gave me,
Of being troubled and broken.
Or the ones professionals give me,
So that they can justify why they are so unspoken.

What makes me different?

I can remember being asked,
Standing in front of my primary school class.
Asked to lay out all the things that set me apart.
But all I wanted was to sink into a crowd,
Not being picked out in a line or in a letter.

So what makes me different?

I can tell you not anything for the better.
But I guess what makes me different isn't my 27 homes,
Broken dreams, broken trust, broken bones.
It's the empathy and kindness I've drawn from the breaks,
That will piece me back together no matter what it takes.

What makes me different isn't the fact that,
As a little boy my favourite colour was black and blue.

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

Broken is Beautiful

It's Remembering that broken crayons can still colour.
That perfect picture of the stars and moon.
What makes me different isn't the scars people can see,
It's the ones inside that can do more damage than you can believe.

The thing is that Broken glass is required to bleed,
But it's also required for the disco ball to gleam.

What makes me different is my hope and dreams,
Because no matter what's happening now or in the past
I dream of a future full of safety and not being scared.
Around people who believe in me, every little part of me.

What makes me different is I look for the good in everyone and
everything, even if some days it's harder to see,
I won't stop looking.
There's always that hope, always to see.

What makes me different?

Is now I have someone else's childhood in my hand,
A dad myself I have another ball of hopes and dreams
And I won't let him down because I can understand.
What it means to be let down,
Broken into a million pieces
And given no support
But a single piece of tape, to turn things around.

But one day I will say to that scared little boy
Still inside of me fighting a war.
You've made it, the war is over.
Put down the sword.

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

Broken is Beautiful

Pick up the broken crayon
Breath in and take over
And write your own story.

For The future is yours for the taking.
Because what makes me different is what makes me, me.
And whilst I can't change the story that's been written for me
And parts of me will always be that little bit broken
One thing I can be say for sure
Beautiful is a little bit broken

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

Spark

Erin, Age 24

Commended

What makes me different

A spark, a little shimmer of light in the darkness.
A spark that's followed her from dusk to dawn
From that moment inside the womb
Her mother knew there was something different...

She was carrying a baby with an internal spark
That little spark grew and dimmed throughout her childhood but never
disappeared

Carrying along pain, guilt and fear
Enduring trauma in each milestone
But no matter how much turmoil was thrown at her
From neglect to addictions
You could always notice this little spark that brought joy in times of
despair

The light radiated from one to another
That little spark carried this little girl through times seemed unbearable.

When life didn't seem worth living
This little spark was almost a spiritual healing giving over and over again

The spark held her up and showed her the light
This little spark was part of her
She could feel it deep within her soul

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

Spark

Others could see it as an aura around her fragile being
She was a little different

She was such a shy kindred spirit but she has a loud voice that could
make mountains move
She was shy but when it came to justice she was the loudest in the room

She was shy but that little spark held her head up high and gave her the
courage and confidence that she needed

This spark was what made her different...
This spark was her gift

As she got older she grew into such a strong woman and that spark
turned into a divine light

She lost her spark and gained her light
She got brighter and brighter
And then one day
A small spark appeared
Something nostalgic was going on
She knew something was different
That small spark was a beautiful boy in the making inside her womb
She was his light and he was her spark...

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

'What Makes Me Different, as told by a 21st Century Bard'

Ira

Winner

Come closer listener...

...huddle around the fire with us in the way we humans have for millennia,
and let me weave you a song, old as time itself and yet also a reminder that
we are each new

and different

You and I, we are a miracle of creation,
I am a wonder of a vast universe,
and this makes me different.

4.54 billion years ago our planet was made,
This may sound rather clichéd,
But our Earth, our dear home,
The place we all now roam,
Is nothing short of a phenomenon displayed.

Even how you and I chose to interpret this tale,
And the facts I henceforth to you regale,
We see in a different light.
And that's completely alright,
To be contrasting makes me, me - it is not to fail.

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

'What Makes Me Different, as told by a 21st Century Bard'

One in 20,000 is the chance of my parents meeting,
The probability of my right DNA even greeting,
Is yet smaller still,
Almost next to nil,
Being 1 in 4 trillion - a chance so very fleeting.

But what makes me different on each day to day,
Is the choices I woke up, thought of and made,
Each 24 hours some 35,000 selections,
I could be very different, upon closer reflections,
If I change but one decision, a new world comes into play.

In summer I chose to focus on my mental health,
A split second choice to apply, brought a new kind of wealth,
I travelled free on a sailboat in the North Sea,
And on it met the love of my life, with whom I could be me,
Someone to laugh, joke and cry with and be all round myself.

Being loved I find brings perspective, and fresh eyes,
That I don't always have, and a new thought - it flies...
You realise just how special your laugh is,
How much your personality can be missed,
And the importance your different-ness makes in peoples' lives.

As a neurodiverse person I've struggled to fit in,
As a care experienced person I've felt rather akin,
To a feeling of otherness and shame,
To a history filled with horrors and pain,
But I'm learning my difference is actually a win.

CARE LEAVER CATEGORY

'What Makes Me Different, as told by a 21st Century Bard'

The way my eyes crease up when I laugh at a joke,
The 'oddness' others have not liked, but to some folk,
They love these quirks and traits,
And it seems it is not in my fates,
To be outcast forever and not one of the blokes.

My personality, attitude and consciousness make me unique,
My trauma taught me hard lessons but in them I seek,
A happier future and reasons to flourish,
And my differences are things that I nourish,
For now that I recognise it, my future's far less bleak.

So listener, dear listener this song comes to close,
And as we draw to the end of this odd-little prose,
I'd say variation amongst humanity,
Is actually keeping us all in sanity,
And what makes me different is what makes me glow.



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getting young voices heard

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