

**Paddy had a very difficult time during his childhood and lived with several family members until becoming settled in a foster home after he voluntarily put himself into care.**

*"I was skinny and didn't eat much; I would eat around friends' houses and I could see things weren't right.*

*My little brother was taken away from us and that was so hard. I didn't even get to see him and it broke my family apart.*

*I was searching for somewhere I could call home. Somewhere I would feel safe and with people who loved me. Things were becoming more difficult at home and I just said I'm leaving and I packed a bag of clothes.*

*I remember my brother was chasing me begging me not to leave and crying but I had to go. I felt torn, but I had to get out.*

*I moved into foster care, but I was very lucky because I was moved to the same foster home as one of my younger brothers. But I still felt so lost and lonely. I just wanted a normal family life so I spent many nights crying in my room.*

*Looking back now, I know how lucky I was to have these carers. I settled in very quickly. They got me involved in their family life, introduced me to new hobbies and have taken me on holiday!*

*School was never easy for me either! I missed 3 years due to being unsettled and not stable enough to focus on work. By the time I felt ready for education I was in Year 10 and had to get on with GCSEs. I knew I needed to focus so I did. I stayed after school for extra help and I had to work really hard.*

*So in the end I didn't come out of school with the best grades but I knew now what I was capable of."*

During his time in foster care, Paddy became involved with The Young Lives Foundation (YLF) and started attending a support group.

*"I became involved with YLF and attended support groups to meet other children in care. This helped me to feel normal, like I wasn't different, and I knew that I could get support here."*

YLF introduced the Children in Care Council (CiCC) to Paddy, as they believed he would gain more confidence and had expressed an interest in helping other young people. Together with other members of the CiCC, he improved and influenced services and became a voice for over 400 looked after children.

YLF was recruiting an apprentice for the CiCC that would allow a looked after child to achieve an NVQ Level 2 in Business and Administration, as well as facilitating the CiCC activities and meetings. Paddy jumped at the opportunity and was successful in securing this new and exciting position and began to work with YLF in November 2014.



When he started work, Paddy didn't have much confidence in this new environment and would struggle to pick the phone up and speak to someone or even book a meeting. With support and encouragement from his CiCC members and the YLF team, Paddy began to develop his personal and professional skills.

The CiCC have accomplished several achievements that have helped Paddy to believe in himself including being on national radio to speak about his story of being in care and participating in a video campaign to emphasise the effects of stigma on looked after children.

Paddy came on leaps and bounds just in the first few months of working as an apprentice. He not only initiated conversations and made phone calls, shared fantastic new ideas and engaged in team meetings but now speaks in front of numerous audiences to share his story of being in care – in fact he received a standing ovation from over 250 people!

Paddy was also present when YLF received a £40,000 cheque in Downing Street and he also gave a speech. He was also on national radio and was filmed to be on telly for BBC Children in Need. Paddy also have went to Heart Radio station for a live interview.

*"I couldn't have done all of this without YLF"*

Paddy says being an apprentice for YLF has given him the motivation and determination to succeed.

*"Here I can stick up for kids like me, who have had a rough start. I think it is really important that we have a voice and for other children who aren't as lucky as me with their foster home and should be able to say how they feel and what can be done better."*

In August 2015, after 3 years of lobbying, planning and fundraising, the CiCC's dream of making a difference in the wider world become a reality. The group journeyed 'Inside India'.

*"I was lucky enough to recently go on an overseas volunteering experience to India with YLF. Teaching in the local school, volunteering in a boy's orphanage and seeing how different life was in India for young people made me realise how much we don't appreciate what we have. They have so little but they gave me so much and taught me a lot!! The experience was inspiring, life-changing and something I will never forget and has definitely made me a better person."*

Paddy completed his Level 2 NVQ in Business and Administration in November 2015 with flying colours and due to his success and further funding given to YLF. Paddy is at the final stages of completing Level 3 NVQ.

*"Over the past 6 months, YLF have helped me to develop personally and professionally. YLF have been a great credit to my life and are also wanting me to do my best. They have helped me conquer my own fears and boundaries and I have learnt more than I thought. I really feel I can help and I know what I want to do – continue to make a difference to young people's lives!"*

Paddy is continuing to progress even further and is now enjoying a new chapter in his career with the Citizens Advice Medway.

*"I couldn't thank YLF enough for all the support and chances they have given me and the challenges I faced. I honestly will miss them all. It has been the most exciting, emotional and memorable two years so thank you to all"*

Paddy is still very much in touch with YLF and continues to represent the Charity in any way he can.