

TIFFANY HAS BEEN IN CARE SINCE 11 YEARS OLD. SHE'S NOW 18, AND LIVING INDEPENDENTLY IN HER OWN FLAT



"Me and my twin sister Kirstee were just at home one day, it was summer and I was 11. Two different social workers turned up. I didn't know why; it was not to our knowledge. We were picked up and went off in their cars and taken to two different foster homes.

It felt like the car journey was taking forever. I sat in shock. We were going so far away. I got very emotional talking to the social worker as I had just left my family for the first time ever in my whole life.

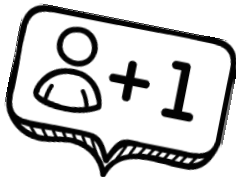
Me and the social worker arrived in Whitstable (about an hour or more from home!) at a really big house. We were greeted by the family; they were really nice and really welcoming but it still wasn't home to me.

I was told I was only going for a week but before I knew it, a whole month had passed. I was starting secondary school in a week and I still wasn't home. I did end up seeing my family and they passed all of my school uniform and that, which my mum had brought before I went into 'care'.



School came around really fast and I was still living in Whitstable. I had to get a taxi to school all the way to Medway every day, there and back. I loved school but the car journey everyday was so long and making me feel sick and really tired. I hated it but I had no choice.

Through most of my secondary school years I was bullied. I was also battling with self-harm and stress, and this affected my learning. So my carers introduced me to a specialist nurse for children in care and also introduced me to Young Lives Foundation. I knew nothing about either of these so I was scared to attend any meetings but when I did I was pleased; the nurse really helped by giving me techniques and ideas to distract myself. I also met a friend who happened to be in care just like me, and he encouraged me to go along to a group at YLF because he already attended.



I remembered joining the groups because it was just before my birthday. We went ice skating. And since then I have done lots of activities with them like skiing, bowling, trampolining, camping out overnight... I loved having somewhere to go that felt 'easy' – it's like you relate to everyone because they are all in care or in need too."

Tiffany really began to blossom at the groups, her confidence grew and so did her network of friends over the years. She joined The Children in Care Council (CiCC) and became a voice for all looked after children in care in Medway and spoke up for their entitlements, attended meetings with other members and was part of a working group that shared ideas about making care better for everyone.



“The groups and the CiCC have really helped me. I speak up a lot more and get to speak to lots of professionals – it helped with my confidence and I’m not as shy around people now. I have interviewed people, done presentations and get involved in important meetings. I was also involved in producing two DVDs – one for foster children to help them when coming into care and one about the effects of stigma on looked after children. I really feel like I have made a difference. And these films can hopefully make other children feel like they’re not the only one; they’re not alone.”



Being part of YLF and all the groups makes me feel special. If I hadn’t joined I wouldn’t be the person I am today. I am definitely a better person. I feel I have a future to look forward to and will make the most of my life – a very different feeling from when I was at home or when I first went into care. I have been given so many opportunities; I even went to India with YLF – that certainly changed my life and helped me realise what I have!

I have now finished college and have a job which I’m really enjoying!

I’m really proud of how far I have come and even just moved into my own place. Without the support I have had I’m not so sure I could’ve done it! And what’s so nice is that I know I have something to be a part of, somewhere to go still and feel supported. I can rely on YLF to help me if I go through a tough time. My journey was a little bumpy but I finally feel I can move on with my life.”

