

# Chris and Gary, Our Justice Podcast

## **SPEAKERS**

Introduction, Speakers 1-5, Chris, Gary

### **Introduction** 00:00

[Mix of voices with music in the background]. The Empathy Museum presents, A Mile In My Shoes.

### **Speaker 1** 00:16

Our justice.

### **Speaker 2** 00:17

Our justice.

### **Speaker 3** 00:18

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Our justice.

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You're listening to Our Justice, a series of true stories and conversations co-produced by three young people with experience of the Scottish justice system. In this episode you hear from Chris.

### **Chris** 00:32

Welcome. As you know, Gary, I'm Chris, I'm a careleaver from Scotland. I wanted to invite you on to this episode, just because you're Gary, you're just such a chilled guy. And you've been about the community of care-experienced people for maybe a couple of decades, which is a very long time now. So just to start off, can you just introduce yourself to, just, the audience?

### **Gary** 01:00

Sure, Chris. My name is Gary Brown, and I am the National Leadership Network Development Co-ordinator for Young People With Care Experience, which is a legacy project for Life Changes Trust.

### **Chris** 01:14

What does it mean to be care-experienced? So what was the definition of that from, say, your eyes as a professional?

### **Gary** 01:20

There's often a lot of discussion around the definition of care experience. I suppose the way I've always looked at it is young people who've got experience of foster care, secure care, residential care, who are

care leavers; they looked after a home is another one; asylum-seeking young people. In my mind, young people who are being looked after by the local authority in that context as well would be care experienced.

**Chris** 01:47

For me, it means somewhere that's away from my natural home. So somewhere where I'm not living with my biological parents. It's somewhere where, as you were saying, the local authority has taken on that responsibility to really look after me; bring me up and sort of keep me as safe as possible, even if I didn't always agree with the ways of doing it. I've experienced looked after at home, residential, foster, and kinship, and secure. So I've had a broad range of experiences here. We're just going to tag team it really quickly here. So I'll just let you start off as, can you give us a definition of residential care?

**Gary** 02:23

My first experience was working in a team of staff who supported young people who were living in houses where, 24 hours a day, if need be there's staff there. I was a social care officer. And getting to know young people, young people would tell me a bit about their life. It obviously made a mark on me because it's where my career's gone, and where I've got a huge passion.

**Chris** 02:50

For me, foster, so the definition of foster for me, is where you're taken from your family into another family. It's a place that you're meant to feel safe and secured. It doesn't always work out for people. But for the majority of people, it does work out. Gary, can you tell us a bit about kinship care?

**Gary** 03:07

My sort of knowledge and understanding of kinship care is if, for whatever reason you can't live with your mum and dad, that you can maybe live with a granny or a granddad or an aunty or an uncle. What's maybe seen as a stereotypical parental role would be taken on by another family member.

**Chris** 03:21

The next sort of definition we're going to talk about is, just, secure care. And for me, that's a place where you go if you've got a lot of charges, and you're a risk to yourself, and you're a risk to the community. It's a place to get the right support in place before you really start to interact with people on the outside. I've added this one in here, can you give us a bit about adoption and the definition around that?

**Gary** 03:41

There's people, young people who are in care, who legally become part of another family in that sort of very permanent way. Effectively, the people who are adopting the child or baby or whoever, the young person becomes part of that family.

**Chris** 04:01

Yeah. You've been a corporate parent for me for quite a bit now. Can you give me a definition of what a corporate parent actually is, and maybe the roles and responsibilities?

**Gary 04:10**

People who are care-experienced, who maybe don't have as many opportunities and experiences, or potential opportunities and experiences as other people, their corporate parents can maybe be involved in helping things to happen. Corporate parents have that responsibility to make sure that young people with care experience are getting as much of a chance and get education, health, housing, all that kind of thing. You've got a complex system, like housing, for example, with a lot of people working in that who maybe don't know anything about care experience. So you've got to think that if you maybe have corporate parenting leads in a housing organisation; there's a mass kind of education to be done so that all services and all staff in all services, organisations and agencies and things like that, understanding the world of care experience, and being able to support people in a sort of meaningful and productive way. I don't think that's always the case, so I think the corporate parenting world's really complex and maybe misunderstood sometimes as well.

**Chris 05:11**

So the last definition before we move on here is around panels. So really, for me, a panel is a place where decisions get made about you. And they're not really good places to be. Just imagine three people one side of the table, and then yourself in the middle at the other side of the table with like your social worker, your teacher, maybe even the safeguarder, or maybe even other professionals like your psychologist or your mental health worker. All around that table making decisions about you, whilst not listening to you on what you're wanting. So for me, panels have really been a negative experience in a number of ways. From your experience of being a professional, which is that buzz word that we don't like, what are panels and really, what do they do?

**Gary 05:11**

My background is all about youth work and community work. And that, it just goes against I suppose, everything I believe in. I mean, a young person being talked about and sitting there quietly, I just don't understand that way of working, that way of thinking. It's like a total 'them and us' situation. It's quite cruel, it's unfair, there's got to be other ways to do things, so.

**Chris 06:19**

What do you think the other ways are?

**Gary 06:21**

Asking the young person what they want, like, always coming back, what do you want? How can this be comfortable for you? You know, you can express your views in lots of ways; it can be in person, it could be written down, it could be recording something on your own and giving it to people. Have a relationship with a young person first, and have a meaningful relationship with them so that they can actually feel like they can trust you to say, 'This is what I want'. So you know, it's not just the case of asking somebody 'What do you want?' It's all the time that goes in before that, which to me, that's what it's about. And they can be supported as well. So they can even, you know, have an advocate or something like that, or have a youth worker with them who may be able to speak on their behalf. And that can all be done, you know, there's just so many ways to do things. But young people at the centre, all the time, has to be.

**Chris** 07:08

I think that's something that we always discuss as young people, like, it's us at the centre, and...

**Gary** 07:14

Uh-huh, I mean, I don't understand how anybody doing the job that I do, if they're not care-experienced, which I'm not, and that's maybe an important thing to say in this discussion. So I'm not care-experienced, so I then, I think my opinion on so much doesn't matter. What my job is, and hopefully what I'm quite good at, is encouraging people to be able to feel comfortable and safe and secure and happy to give me their point of view. My job should be about standing back, and young people taking the lead. Because where I've come from, and this is the Youth Work sector, the way you know you're doing your job well, is if you're standing leaning against the wall, and there's a group of young people, or an individual young person, doing a presentation or standing up doing something brilliant, or being involved in something for the first time, or whatever, whatever. But if they're doing all the stuff, and you're just standing back watching them - it's like breaking down the concept of power and making sure young people know they have so much of it. What I would love to see happen is that in the care experience community, there's maybe more Youth Work staff involved and things, I think that would be a great thing.

**Chris** 08:21

Oh I agree wi' you, I think it would be a great thing to see maybe staff being more involved in this. And so, taking that step back, but also been very actively involved with the young person. That's a whole lot of work, and it should be, and I think what's been really interesting over the last, sort of, few years, is the fact they've had the Independent Care Review. But a lot of that stuff and a lot of the ideas have come to light again, even though we were saying it as care-experienced people before the Review. We were never really truly heard or listened to. The Review came about, and I feel like that's where they started a lot of people thinking about, 'Well, how am I working? How can I work in the best way?' And I think what's really important now, is the fact of the promise is here as well, the promise isn't going anywhere anytime soon. And I think that people have been in that initial recognising what they've done wrong. And I think now it's about the implementation of, well, I done this wrong, this is what I'm going to try better. We're seeing that right now across all the cities. [Yes]. Like, we're seeing managers now go, alright, I want to now get relationships with young people. Can I be a part of the group instead of saying, I'm going to be a part of it.

**Gary** 09:24

Definitely. The Care Review was about listening to people who have the experience. I mean, that's what it was about, done on a national stage so that everybody could see it. And, you know, it's been a great thing. And I know it's easy to say things like co-production and da-de-da but it's about people doing things together.

**Chris** 09:42

So really, yeah. Just going to move on to the next part, which is just around criminal justice. Just going to talk about my criminal justice experience, 'cos I've had quite a varied experience of it. But this one time will always stick out in my mind, it'll always be there. Because of the care system being so unsettled, I was moving from place to place; my clothes, all my things were in black bags. I didn't ever

find out in advance that I was moving. It was literally, I left school, my social worker was there, I was moving. Because of all of that I had a lot of criminal justice experience, a lot of charges. To give you an example, I was charged with quite a serious crime, probably equates to about GBH, and that was because I threw a yoghurt pot at one of the senior members of staff, I threw a yoghurt pot at them. And they phoned the police; the police arrived, maybe 10 minutes later, and the police weren't wanting to charge me with anything, they weren't wanting to take me to the station and go through all the process, because as we can all tell, it was quite a stupid, a very stupid charge here. But the residential care officer was adamant I was getting charged with it, was adamant that I had to be charged with it. And then I was arrested, 'cos they had to arrest you; charged, taken up to the police station, they had to phone an emergency social work team, my social worker was involved. They had to bring somebody up from the unit, all the process for the process for the process at that time. I spent, we're talking maybe six hours in a police interview room, just sitting there, waiting to be interviewed and charged. On hearing that Gary, what do you think the role of the corporate parent should have been in that situation?

**Gary 11:10**

There's a thing around the police having a corporate parenting responsibility in that. There's a thing about the member of staff who wanted you to be charged for that. Why did he want that to happen? Why was that allowed to happen? Was there any comeback on, like, what happened to the person who did that to you? So there's the whole thing, the fact that was all allowed to happen is unbelievable. It's not; it's believable, but it's wrong in so many ways. I don't... just amazes me, it's just, that's a horrible, horrible thing to hear.

**Chris 11:46**

Yeah, I don't get it either. I guess professionals, if they're coming into this line of work, I guess, they just need to understand that this isn't just a job; like, you're looking after living, breathing human beings, who need a bit of, maybe not always need that extra bit of support, but they're just trying to create a family home for themselves. For me, in my experience of residential homes, it's like, only, I think only one has ever felt like a family home. And that was when we were included in the simplest of decisions of, 'What do you want for your tea? What size of TV do you want?' I think we're losing the key members of staff who are trying to make the residential homes like homes instead of having them as, I guess the things you see in the media, the staffroom, that brings us nicely on to the next part is. For me, like, what you see in the media about residential homes, and what I've been seeing more and more often nowadays is, articles of people campaigning, like, the local community going, we don't want this home here. These are challenged kids, crime rate is going to go up. There's a lot of stereotypes and a lot of assumptions made about us before they people sort of like get to know us. And for me, that's probably through media portrayal. And that's through like, what we see in the media is care-experienced people being negative. So we're always in the jail; we're always on drugs; we've got mental health problems; we're this, we're that. For me, it's influenced through the producers who, I guess are wanting the sob stories, who I guess are wanting the, sort of, oh this'll make an impact, without actually realising that there's real humans behind that, who aren't always like that. From your perspective as a professional, how do you think local communities are influenced in regards to care, like residential homes?

**Gary 13:25**

So many films, there's a young person who's, has issues in the film and stuff like that. Often not mentioned, oh they were looked after by somebody else, and they weren't in a traditional family home and stuff like that. You see that constantly, so that goes on all the time. There's a whole kind of laziness as well with the general public, and maybe the media, to not find out the reality of people's lives. What I'm really happy to see happen is that organisations like Each and Every Child, whose purpose is the whole reframing agenda in the care experience community. To me nothing more important than that, because they are going to the media and saying, please think about the way you word things; please think about the stories you tell; please think about why you're telling the stories and all that stuff. So that's been a long time coming and I think good stuff will come from that. But you've still got a massive... there's a lot of education needing to happen in schools etc, etc about not just care-experience, but just about looking at people as people.

**Chris** 14:27

What I can say, Gary, is, thank you for that.

**Gary** 14:30

Thank you.

**Speaker 5** 14:37

Thank you for listening to Our Justice. This is a Boldface production, in partnership with Community Justice Scotland and the Empathy Museum.