

Voices

The 22 shortlisted entries
from Coram Voice's 2017
writing competition for looked
after children and care leavers



A message from Peter Capaldi



“It’s with immense pleasure that I am supporting the Coram Voice 2017 ‘Voices’ writing competition, showcasing the amazing talent of children and young people in and leaving care. The Voices competition is the only one of its kind providing a platform for care experienced children and young people to share and celebrate their powerful and unique voices. By doing this it gives us an insight into, and a little more understanding of, their experiences. It is truly inspiring to see the talent that has been expressed and I would like to thank all of you who have taken the time and courage to share your stories and ‘new beginnings’ this year. I found it so moving when reading the entries, and the chance to gain a small but powerful insight into a young person’s experience of the care system has been eye-opening. I hope that this competition will help encourage even more young people to use creative ways to share their stories by allowing us to really celebrate the talent of these incredible young people.”

A big thank you...

...to the Queens Trust, the Hadley Trust, Rosemary and Bernard Mayes, Tim Sharp and Helen Bessemer-Clark and the individual donors whose financial contributions made this competition possible. Thank you to our inspirational judges: Jenny Molloy, Paolo Hewitt, Nikesh Shukla, Alex Wheatle, Jackie Long, Keren David and Luke Stevenson, and to our brilliant host Peter Capaldi, for kindly offering his time to join us in celebrating these great young people. Thank you to all the wonderful volunteers who helped us shortlist the entries and the people across the country who helped promote Voices 2017. Thank you to Oxford University Press and Jessica Kingsley Publishers who kindly donated their books for the awards. Thank you to Ellie Meakin, Emma Lamberton and everyone else in the Coram Group without whom there would be no Voices 2017. Thank you to Muna Adams whose inspiration established this competition.

The biggest thank you of all goes to all the young people who entered this competition and shared their wonderful and unique stories. This publication showcases the shortlisted entries, but there were so many more moving and thought-provoking entries. Thank you for showing us how brilliant you really are and for giving us an insight into your perspectives on life, love and new beginnings.



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My First Match

*I wrote my poem/rap about my first footy match for **** United under 10s. My foster carer takes me to all the training and matches and stands in the cold every Saturday morning. And she washes my kit.*

My first match,
My breath I can't catch,
A hug to relax,
She helps me chillax,

Changing room disorder,
She's my best supporter,
Coach going mad like he oughta,
Gonna win – we gotta.

I'm part of a team,
My teams in Green,
Strip of white in between,
She washed it clean,

Out on the pitch,
Out positions fixed,
Opposite our enemies,
Same as us – different identities.

Kick off whistle,
The game on – it's official,
She supports me – It's that simple,
Kick pass header dribble,

Cheeky pass forward,
Defender wrong footed,
Change to press onward,
Perfect cross booted.

Header in muddy midfield,
Feet should be four wheeled,
A space is revealed,
The space is gaping,

Balls mine for the taking,
Legs are aching,
Crowd is baiting.
Four strides to the keeper,

Feels like a hundred meters,
Direct kick or a faker,
Knick now or later,
I'm rocking new Nikes,

Goalie trying to psych me,
Wanna tackle – try me,
Bang – top bins – bite me,
She's the loudest in the crowd,

Cheering me on proud,
Goal allowed,
I dabbled and bowed,
Man of the match I am crowned!

**J (age 9),
Wales**

1ST PLACE



Judges' comments: "We liked the way the writer had conveyed feelings of empowerment and optimism through the very active description of a football match, and the clever way they drew parallels between different ways of being a supporter"

My New Family

Me & the Smiths*

Years & years to come

New beginnings, new school

Everlasting love

With nieces & nephews brothers sisters

Fun & games forever

Also lots of love to come

Magical memories to find out about

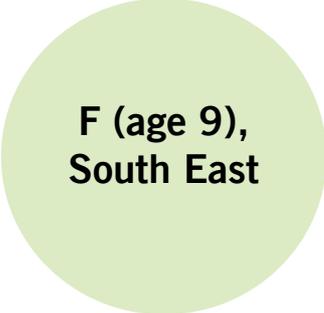
Increase the love & hugs

Love laugh, live forever more

Yearly excitement

REMEMBER CHANGES

CAN BE GOOD!



**F (age 9),
South East**

Friends

*This is a poem based on one of my BEST FRIENDS!!!
Her name is Nina* and she lives in ****. For 3 months
last year Nina* had Pneumonia. She is fine now but
it was a hard time for her.
NINA* I LOVE YOU!!!*

Friends, friends to always keep,
even though they are hard to seek.
Never ever peek,
On their private things.
Or they will leave.

You may disagree
But they will never completely flee.
As long as you support each other when times get tough,
They will help you if you feel rough.
If they are teased,
Then make them feel pleased.
And if they are down,
Then turn that frown upside down.

Even if you are far apart,
Always keep it in your heart.
That they will stay with you forever
As long as you NEVER forget them.

3RD PLACE



Judges' comments: "A heart-warming poem which pays tribute to the importance of a really good friend who you can trust"

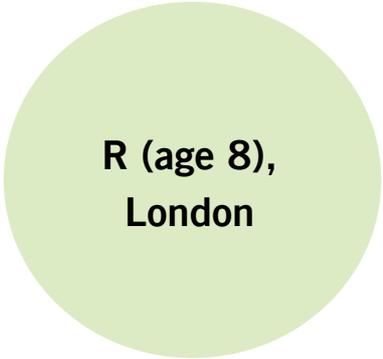
**E (age 10),
East of England**

A Long way

A long way, away from you and I there was a boy sick with fear. In fact, he was very lonely because he was a poor orphan. But he was not in an orphanage as his house was in the middle of Norway Bog, the murkiest, dampest bog in the world! The boy could not escape because surrounding his ramshackle house there was a maze of gnarled trees. The boy's name was Lucius. He hated his squalid house which he was also very of frightened of as in his house there was a perilous, hideous ghost. Every time the ghost was wandering around Lucius would hide behind an ancient, dusty crate.

One day Lucius was hiding behind the crate when phantasmagorically he found a wand and a book of spells. "Wicked!" he cried and his voice echoed around the spooky house. Suddenly the ghost sprang out. Lucius jumped back in surprise. He quickly shouted "Klandra!" and the ghost was killed twice but then it came back to life again and got killed thrice. Lucius 'Hip, hip, hoorayed' to himself. Subsequently, he sat outside looking at the vivid night sky. "I wish I could see my mum and dad again," he thought.

Then suddenly the trees surrounding the house cleared into a path and Lucius saw his Mum and Dad. He ran down to greet them and he hugged them with all his might. He discovered his parents were not dead after all. His dad was a famous Mayor and his mum clever code breaker. They all left the house which was as boring as a sentence without any adjectives. They went to live happily ever after in a massive mansion with an exquisite pet phoenix which was as red as a ruby.



**R (age 8),
London**

I remember the first day

I remember the first day I started in year 6. At first it was scary but also exciting because I am getting older and soon I will be in big school. It was so nerve racking because I have to do my SATs soon which are one of the biggest test in my life, well not including A levels but that's in like 6 years which I don't need to worry about.

Anyway I walked in the class room with my face down because I didn't know anybody. A couple mins later I was sat down and everyone started helping me get along and fit in. About an hour later this boy called David* help me a lot because the first thing he said to me was, "Hey Abi*, do you want to play with me at playtime, I think it might be fun." Because I had only joined I didn't know what to say but I ended up playing with him and it was really fun he helped me a lot. Later that day we painted some flowers and I was partners with this girl called Susan*, who is now one of my best friends right now, she is an inspiration to me.

Building learning power club.....B....being a part of year 6 is a dream come true u....unusually I fall out with my friends l.... I love my life through think and thin L....



**J (age 10),
Yorkshire & the
Humber**

New Beginnings

Never trust your mums, they say they will but they don't
Ensure you listen carefully and follow the rules, or you will get seriously hurt
When you're good you are promised a treat, but it never happens

Before I left I gave them all a cuddle. I said I would never forget them.

Everyone I know has gone. Everywhere I look is strange.

Give up thinking about your family, they are never gonna come back

I love my family and it's really hard not being with them

Nevertheless, now I've got my new family but I'll never forget

Now it's time to move on again. I had so much fun

I'm not moving schools. I'm so glad I've still got my friends and teachers

Now I'm with my new carers. I will never forget them

Gavin* and Rachel* are fun. I've been everywhere and seen so much

Such love and happiness to take with me to my long term carers

**C (age 11),
Yorkshire & the
Humber**

2ND PLACE



Judges' comments: "This writer wasn't scared to talk about difficult emotions, and conveyed them in a powerful and memorable way."

The gentle breeze

The gentle breeze of wind scurried over my back as I awoke to a new day, I breathed a soft sigh as I collected my thoughts, each word travelling around my brain like a hurricane. I had been warned so I knew what to expect. I got up and put on my pyjamas and tip-toed downstairs where I noticed the letter on the sofa, it was a warning that I could be taken away from my home. Most children would be scared, maybe cry, but I had to be strong. As I poured my drink and set it on the table I thought of the events that had led to this point; the few disasters that would change my life. The first and most important disaster was when my mother went into debt; she was happy to admit it was her fault but she still knew that life was about to get tough. We went from being a fairly normal family who lived off high brand food to being a family scrounging for even the smallest benefits. Long story short; my mother broke, she understood that she couldn't care for me like this and made the hardest choice of her life. I still think about that call she made. Since we lived in a small house I heard every word from her mouth, I could even make out some of the words on the other end of the phone. It was obvious that it was the police with the typical voice. "This is the state department, what's your emergency" and all that scripted rubbish.

My mother cried and pleaded that they help me, take me somewhere where I could live happily again. I cried too. I cried all night, not because I felt unwanted but because I knew my mum was doing the right thing. Not long after I was greeted at the door by a social worker who had to take me to my new home, she was very cheerful, which helped bring my already low mood up. She explained how the next few weeks of my life would go and what would happen, all of which I was fine with, and stopped the car outside of a small, but very cosy, house. "Don't worry" she told me with a glint of joy in her eyes as she knocked on the door. A man answered, quite old but seemingly pleasant, he too gave off a feeling of cheeriness. He showed me to my room and left again to talk to the social worker while I laid out my things and placed them where needed. I found a picture of my mother and I and clutched it against my chest as I laid down and closed my eyes. I finished my story with a strong smile as I looked into the eyes of my new carers of just over a year, it had taken a long time to be comfortable enough to tell them, but now, it feels like home.

1ST PLACE



Judges' comments: "This was an extraordinarily powerful first-person account which took the simplest approach but still stood out as being very maturely written in a way that put us in the writer's shoes."

**J, (age 17)
South West**

Bright ahead past way behind

Already in my room but my ears heard their muffled words,
Lies from that carer, on who was downstairs.
Told to be quiet and return back to my room.
But why, I don't want to, but no-one listened.

Thankfully it turned out the voice meant I was to be moved on.
Random journey with Social Worker, radio playing out.
Freaky conversation about a dead child,
that the cruel woman who called herself Mum had lost.

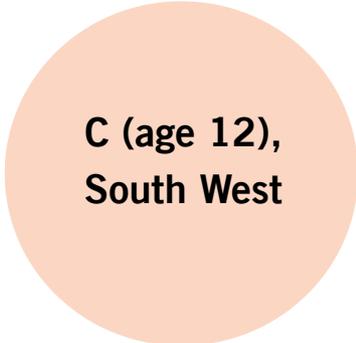
Saw my new placement, wow like a mansion.
Wait, steady, calm down, deep breaths.
Walk over, doors open, floating smells of food.
Two people smiling something I'm not used.

COULD THIS BE IT, A HOME.

Days into weeks into months, trust grows, fun begins, laughter heard.
Back with my sister and brother, they giggle, they eat, we cuddle here.
This where it starts this is where I want it to end

HERE AS A FAMILY.

The life of a girl who has been here a short time but in her heart a life time.
A lost girl, a found girl, a girl with a life now.
New start, reborn at seven years two months,
no worry about that, just different, no need to explain.
Just a future, hope, acceptance, a world to meet,
yes a life to greet and live for, the reason to go on.
I'm looking forward!



**C (age 12),
South West**

The wet October nights

The wet October nights were desolate, drenching and demoralising.
I wandered the streets in a naive attempt to rest my head, this cold, wet bench was my bed.

I was learning the skills of this urban jungle.

Learning to show no fear.

no trust.

no love.

All of these were eroded away with the rain of each passing day.

Nothing could prepare me for the coldness of them nights.

I could not differentiate between this numbing, blistering wind and the numbness that lied within my core as a void.

An abyss of emptiness.

Something was missing.

Someone was missing.

I was reborn that November.

Given the warm blanket of their unconditional love.

Given a cup of tea with 2 lumps of understanding and acceptance.

You see, water doesn't have to be grey and imposing like that October rain.

It can be blue,

purifying

and truly beautiful.

I realise this because I learnt to swim this year.

My swimming abilities are a symbol of pulling through to the other side.

Because the hardest part of swimming is overcoming the fear of drowning.

But now I have that secure base.

I have people that will lift my head and spirit high above the water.

Now I don't have to be scared of the world.

Once I came to this realisation I could see the world's true beauty.

You see, there is a misconception that it is harder to learn new skills as you age. But this is only because you become fearful and cynical of the world around you. But this doesn't have to be the case. Nobody has to be hardened by their past to a point of no return. I believe there is a child in all of us trying to get out. Curiously and courageously seeking adventure.

Swimming wasn't my new skill, learning to be open minded and open hearted was.

The people that gave me that warm blanket and tea have given so much more in the past three years that I have known them.

They have created my new beginning.
Just as I have created their new beginning.

**A-J (age 17),
Yorkshire & the
Humber**

2ND PLACE



Judges' comments: "The use of language to show the range of settings and emotions this young person found themselves in was really brilliant. It evoked so strongly their feelings that it made us connect very strongly with their personal story."

New beginnings

I lay alone in an incubator box,
Poisoned.
My body twisted-stiff.
I didn't understand
This world of pain
in which I was set adrift.

Until I was scooped up -
In arms that love me.
That held me in - tight and warm.
That made my pain more bearable.
That gave me hope in being born. 🧒

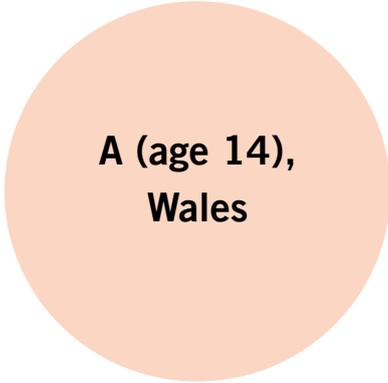
I walked alone,
In the 'play'ground.
Trying desperately to catch someone's eye;
Trying eagerly to be 'part of' it;
Trying fiercely not to cry.

Until I was scooped up -
In arms that love me.
That took me out of school.
And they told me that I AM good enough.
That my classroom can be at home.
And I am learning to learn again,
And becoming smiley-whole. 😊

I sat alone
In my bedroom.
Battered, shocked and hurt.
Trying not to think about WHO
did this to me.
Why? How could they be so monster-cruel?

Until I was scooped up,
In arms that love me.
That held me safe and tight.
That never left me
Day or night.
And they stood up and by and for me;
And they went to court and fought -
And won. 🏆

Now I am alive again.
Those memories will no longer beat me
down.
I am a Royal Princess Palace-bound.
New beginnings are paved before me
And truly, completely - at least for now -
I am ME again.
Look! I'm wearing my happiness crown! 👑



**A (age 14),
Wales**

3RD PLACE

It all started

Yeah it all started when me and my fam parted
They said it wasn't my fault
But they was a part of me that knew it was
I didn't have the guts to stand up to the heads
so I kept my head down and at the right time went to bed.

But then s*** went dead I started walking away from the rules they put there
Got kicked out of schools and homes and in time I didn't care
I didn't show no fear
Hood up tunes on walking round the streets either that or on a BMX
Trying to run and find beef I didn't call my sen a thief
But whenever someone was happy I did my best to crease
ye it was stupid of me cos I tried to take that away
I guess they had what I didn't so it was an emotion in a way.

I went to this place i guess my heart was pounding
cos that's the 9th place I've been to I was unsure when they wasn't shouting
Cos I was used to b***** 24/7 Shouting and arguing I guess this place was
heaven.

They took me in fed me bought me clothes talked to me when I was down
Tried to help me in the way that I needed
and sed " we will always be around and we are Here when you need us"
I knew at that time I wasn't leaving I started believing
not just in me but the future I could be leading
All thanks to them in side I'm not bleeding

This lyrics that your listening to
Is my life story that I'm reading
So listen up life's not all bad
Of course missed my dad
but I know he's proud and happy with the life I've had
It may not have been all good but it's not been all bad
I'm starting to change and I wish sooner that I would have
but this is my time and I know they are gonna continue to help me out
Thanks Megan* and Bob* I hope I make you proud.



Judges' comments:

"This had the strongest voice and identity. It felt like we knew the young person. We don't feel they changed anything about themselves to write this piece,

**C (age 15),
Yorkshire & the
Humber**

Shattered Glass

Shattered into a million pieces,
amongst all, one piece,
stands out...

 For all the wrong reasons.
To you, it shines in the light.
 Glistening with perfection.
To me, a cloud of darkness.
 Danger.
Danger like a source of black magic.
 Danger I can sense.
 Never seen or heard.
Shattered glass burdened with sin.

The sharp edge twists,
Round and round the tip of my finger.
My anger gets the better of me.

Tears fill my eyes.
 Giddiness takes over.
I look left,
 I look right.

Shattered glass—everywhere.
In my anger, I throw the picture at the wall.
A picture locked inside,
Like me. The door always locked... from
the inside Scared Trapped.
Unable to break free.
In my anger, I throw the picture at the wall.
Inside, a picture is stored.
Glass.

A picture of us.
A picture of me...
 And of him.
A picture which means more to me
 than any snapchat filter.
A picture of me,
And my brother.
Who has been taken from me,
Stolen from himself.
Only he can find himself,
Or he'll be lost forever.
I watch the frame fall,
Until it reaches the ground.
Shattered into a million pieces.
All but one.
Stands out from the rest,
 ... for all the wrong reasons.
You don't understand.
I can see through the glass.
It's more than just transparent,
 Its weak. Fragile.
 Hidden and lost.
I know.
Because its my shattered glass.
And I know it better than anyone.
I cut myself.
The sharp edge slit my skin.
Causing me to bleed.
I stain the wall.
I use my blood,
As if it were paint,
 I stain the wall with a cross.

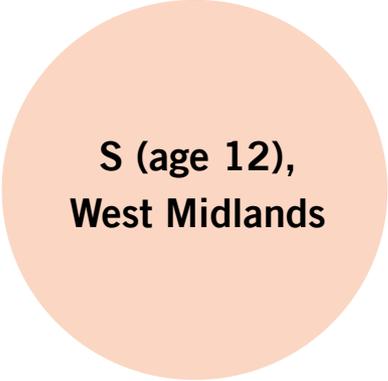
I scarred the wall and with it....
 My mind.
My mind – of course.
Typically it strikes again
I didn't cut myself or stain a wall.
My mind has been taken over by demons.
The demons from my nightmares.
They're in my head;
Shrieking.
 Giggling at my misery.

My body may not be scarred,
But my mind is.

I take a deep breath,
Dry my eyes.
But I know I'm not safe.
I curl up on my bed,
My picture at my side-
 Safely inside its home.

I wish the same could be said for me.
My home, can't be called a home.
Happiness does not pass through my
house.
Its like a haunted house,
Anyone who enters doesn't leave the same
-mentally. I'm in thick grey fog,
When I see him.
He reaches for me,
But when I get there... he's gone.
My new beginning is different from yours.

You see, life doesn't owe me.
Yet still, two years on this is my life.
I have a crazy family and I love it.
A mum and a dad and sisters and cousins,
aunts and uncles.
Friends.
Happiness.
And everyday I wake up and I smile.



**S (age 12),
West Midlands**

Her Wildest Dreams

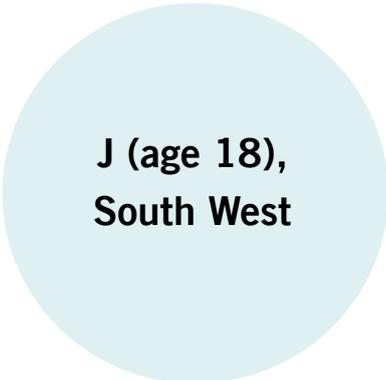
Knees shaking, hands grasping
for the bag that holds the contents of her life.
Unable to comprehend
how this could be any different.

A warm face, a twinkling eye.
They open the door
to reveal a whole new world.
One that defies her wildest dreams.

They personify kindness,
Hearts looking to warm
everything she knew.
They offered her love,
an eternity of affection
that would make everything okay.

The fear melts, anxiety subsides.
As she takes the first step
into the house, into her future,
she knows this is a good thing.
All the weight of worry
is lifted by their hearts.

And she finds herself thinking
for the first time in her life
“This is a family”.



**J (age 18),
South West**

This is a letter to me from me aged 22 years to myself aged 8 years

I have chosen to write a letter to me aged 8 years because this is when I came into care. As an 8 year old I found it really scary to wake up, go downstairs and see my dad with a suitcase. I thought we were going on holiday but actually we were getting into a strangers car (I did not know where we were going or what was going on) and then we pulled up outside someone's house then I remember going through the door with my parents and a suitcase and being told that I would have to stay here. I would not let go of my mum. I cried. I thought my mum and dad did not love me. Then they left.

Dear Jack* (aged 8),

Things are going to be fine. Try not to worry or be afraid. You are going into a loving, warm family who will care for you. Eventually you will also see your old friends from primary school who you did not think you would see again. Bob* and Mike* will turn up and make you feel more at ease at your foster placement.

Life will be fine, there is light at the end of the tunnel.

Whenever you are offered help, accept that help.

Learn from your mistakes and be stronger.

Enjoy yourself; make new friends you will be going to a new primary school literally down the road.

Have fun!!!



**J (age 22),
East of England**

New Beginnings Poem

Coming into care at the age of fourteen
It's not a nice feeling when you're being escorted
To a family that's not been specified
All you want to do is sit and hide
No place to go, no one familiar in your home
Start of my first chapter in care

After many moves I was so confused
Nothing seemed to be going right
I couldn't sleep at night
The placements breaking down
Falling to the ground
The pain in my heart
No hope left scars marked
One last move my last chance
Look so scary at first glance

One January afternoon twenty fourteen
A new chapter in my book a new beginning
A different place I'd never been
Strangers all around
People making sounds
Not used to this
I'm out of my place
Don't know what to do
Don't know what to say
Feeling like a rabbit in headlights
So bright under the spot light

I met a nice lady my key worker to be
She was kind and so funny
We talked about life and what I liked
From football to art and writing music too
We shared and interest did something new

She settled my nerves made me feel at ease
Two years later I've moved out
And she's there at a shout

This new beginning changed my life
I'm so much stronger
I've had to fight
The monsters at night
But this is my life
I'm the one who's going to strive

The past is in the past the future is near
I'm not gunna shed a tear
Starting from the bottom
Now aiming for top
Music is my life writing nonstop
People say care kids amount to nothing
But I'm going to prove them wrong,
I'm going to be something
Working hard being strong
Fresh start I can be me
I'm going to get this uni degree

A smile on my face
I'm in a better place
Bad pasts and the scars do last
Being you is the best you can be
Don't change for anybody you are you
we all have equality.



2ND PLACE



Judges' comments: "This piece had such a distinctive voice, a lyrical, musical style which we particularly loved. It is a brilliant piece of storytelling that moves through periods of pain and sadness but ends very positively - not with any attempt to bury the past but to live with it and use it to go forward. A real achievement, well done."

I know what it's like to be a butterfly

I know what it's like to be a butterfly... the world is large and overwhelming. Not being sure where you fit in and how such a fragile and exposed creature can protect and provide for itself, amongst the darkness and the rain that falls. To be aware that one drop of rain can kill a butterfly; having to be strong in the face of danger, yet showing beauty and elegance and everyone around the butterfly feels love, not realising the real feelings or emotions the butterfly goes through every day to survive. The butterfly being so small and delicate they are under constant threat from predators that will kill them. Not being able to escape the chase from the creature that has decided to attach its vision to the luminescent colours that reflect and beam from the butterfly's wings, which makes the butterfly beautifully vulnerable. the butterfly seems to dip in and out of the air so easily almost as if there is such powerful control in such an innocent being that you can't recognise how much effort the butterfly puts in to stay floating in the air... But a butterfly does not start out as a butterfly. The butterfly had changed.

Before the butterfly had changed it was a caterpillar. The caterpillar that started out was greedy and selfish and although still vulnerable to other predators, the caterpillar seemed safer than the butterfly. The caterpillar was able to hide and close the world around itself away, finding solace in the silence and the darkness. The caterpillar was not damaged or killed by rain; the caterpillar just kept eating and eating, getting larger and larger and gluttonizing itself with contentment and sometimes misery. After a while the caterpillar changed. It took a very long time and the caterpillar became slow and even more delicate to danger. The caterpillar surrounded itself with the walls of its cocoon and hibernated in silence. No one to protect the vulnerability of the caterpillar anymore... the caterpillar was changing and it was changing alone. For what seemed like forever soon ended and the walls of the cocoon opened allowing the transformation of the caterpillar to the butterfly. What the caterpillar longed for was freedom, but when the caterpillar had become the butterfly, freedom was no longer desired and all the butterfly wanted and needed was protection and love...

I know what it's like to be a butterfly, I also know what it's like to be a caterpillar, and how so much change can affect even the smallest things in life, and can change the beautiful into the broken and the tough into the weak. The longing and desires of change, but never being able to protect yourself within the change.

The being alone due to greed, selfishness and lack of emotion; to the longing for one person to let you know they will be there and protect you through the scariest and most dangerous times in your journey of life, but never quite making it to that person before the rain starts falling and you could potentially die. I know I have been the caterpillar many times and I have been cocooned many more times, and every now and again I am the butterfly I wish there was another adaption to the butterfly who could fend for itself and never be the prey or the predator to others, just something strong and independent, powerful but majestic in beauty and seeing the beauty that it could share with others, the rain not damaging or killing it. Just being able to overcome the alone, the silence and the fragile to being one thing... Me!

**N (age 24),
East of England**

1ST PLACE



Judges' comments: "This was an incredibly strong piece of writing and illustrated very clearly the strength it can sometimes take just to get through life - particularly a life which has thrown up so many challenges. The longing to find out who you are and ultimately to be allowed to be yourself was so brilliantly summed up by the closing lines. This was a sophisticated, complicated piece perfectly reflecting how complicated life is and the butterfly - a beautiful symbol of fragility yes, but also of resilience."

A young teenager

A young teenager, with no understanding of English language, enrolled himself at ***** College at age of 16; what he could speak was only (hello, hi, and how are you); nothing else. He was interested, enthusiastic, and passionate in education and wanted to widen his knowledge, but the fate and bad situation in his home country took the entire opportunity from him.

That young teenager is me whose unknown destiny drove him here in the UK. When I arrived from a war torn country to a developed country, it was extremely tough to find my feet but my teachers and key worker supported me to avert my feeling of being in a foreign country; that there is no place for me, as a young migrant.

For a while everything was as tough as you could imagine, from social isolation to the language barrier and indecisive. The life was going on with dullness; I neither had the courage to speak with someone nor was daring enough to make friends. As a result of the language barrier, I was feeling isolated most of the time in the college and lacked confidence. Most of my class peers were fluent in speaking the language. I had to motivate myself, but it was not working. I was overwhelmed by difficulties. Let me describe it in one word that is Miserable! My teachers always encouraged and inspired me by their motivating, powerful and wonderful words; as always my key worker does. They advised me not allow the word (I can't) in your vocabulary.

With my thinking, things started to change. I convinced myself that I had to learn the language, as I didn't like to be dependent to someone else. I began listening to news, English podcasts, music, reading daily newspaper, attending college regularly on time, going to English speaking club and many others activities to drag myself out of this situation; as all of them paid off.

One thing I love about this country is that there are opportunities available for everyone to pursue their lofty dreams and to choose their career in any field they wish to. I found people absolutely nice and friendly, contrary to my earlier doubts if there were lovely and kind people still existed and that gave me hope for humanity.

I'm delighted to tell you that my efforts have started to follow my dreams and I have achieved that looked impossible a year ago; to be the student president at *****

College, passed my course with good grades. Achievements inspire me to work hard towards my future goals. A substantial credit of my success goes to the support of my friends, teachers and my keyworker.

2ND PLACE



Judges' comments: "It ends in a hopeful way and the school imagery is very powerful."

**A (age 17),
London**

My Life

I was never born to live in one place,
My life so far
Has been an unexpected adventure
New places;
New people;
New cultures.

I always have to adapt,
Sometimes I don't fit in
Because people don't understand where I have come from
But sometimes, I find people like me
And we bond.
We share our experiences
We laugh and
We cry.

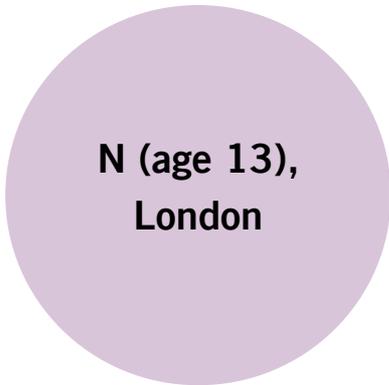
Sometimes I wonder
How it feels to grow up in one place with the same people
Will I feel part of something?
That I will never know.
My life consists of new beginnings.

**C (age 19),
London**

***Also shortlisted
in the Care Leavers
category!***

The Prayer I Sent

Who do I ask?
Why is it like this?
That moment of happiness
Where do I find them?
There is no sign from the time
So many people complained on their lips
So distant from life
Why do the dreams plea so much in these eyes?
When I lose the lines on my hand for no reason
The prayer I sent
It has hit the sky in such a way
That my request has come back unanswered
Which way have my breaths turned to
I don't see a path ahead
Where did my heart beats leave my heart?
Where did my body leave its shadow?
This is what I think about again and again,
Here lonely walking with me are the hazy memories
The prayer I sent
It has hit the sky in such a way
That my request has come back unanswered
A sign of god it is, new beginning I name it.



**N (age 13),
London**

Please help me guys

Please help me guys
At the lonely moment
My mind is having stress
My life is so mess
Who I tell to solve my problem
How do I travel to reach into my dream?
I deal with life face to face
It's as far as the sky and the space
A long none end way I have been through
The hardness of life is getting me too
It seems marry a stranger or move to a strange,
I prefer none.

**G (age 17),
London**

3RD PLACE



Judges' comments: "We loved how this poem had such a clear message"

When a door closes, a better door opens

I have suffered, I know what it feels like not having anything to eat.
I have suffered, only for great occasions my mother cooked meat.
Not having enough, I used to go to school with broken shoes in my feet,
In my class everyone was rich, I had to work very hard to reserve my seat.

My mum sometimes cried when she looked at me,
Saying I've got potential but will not find opportunity.
It's not because she did not have big dreams for me.
But because only money opens doors in my country
She stopped living her life just so I can live mine,
She neglected herself for me but she didn't mind.
Her love was overwhelming even though she couldn't provide much
Even now after three years I can still feel her sweet touch.

Our priority was my education
We couldn't afford to pay school but she had the determination.
Money wasn't bigger issue than my sexual orientation,
Which got me condemned by my entire nation.
Political issues where I come from created insecurity,
And it was not every day that my house had electricity.
I had to sleep in the dark despite my Achluophobia,
Gunshots every night were the reasons for my insomnia.
But with the help of the Lord I ended up coming to the UK
At first I had issues and things were not okay
Once I landed in the airport I was taken into care
Stopping me from realising my dream of living with my father
Living with strangers whilst my Dad has a house seemed a little unfair.
But I did not know that care would make my life even better.

But after all, since November last year,
I became independent I can buy what I want which makes me more confident .
I sleep peacefully and happily every night,
As there is not gunshots and I sleep with my light shine and bright.
I am celebrated at college for my achievement because I work to the best of my abilities

I go to college gratuitously and I have other educational opportunities
I can work part-time to provide to Mum and my family.
And I know one day I will give her life back to my Mummy
I am now free to be myself as my characteristics are protected.
But I could not where I come from or else I would have been killed
I work with Sheffield City Council to make life better for the other kids.
Being involved as much as possible to help the council meeting their needs,
It is an opportunity for me to show my gratitude as Sheffield has changed my life
and life has changed my attitude
Being in the position that I am right now is a new beginning,
and this beginning is promising and wonderful.
But I will always carry the memory of my past,
as it permits me to enjoy my new life and to be grateful.

**J (age 18),
Yorkshire &
the Humber**

*Also shortlisted
in the Care Leavers
category!*

1ST PLACE



Judges' comments: "So powerful, melted our hearts. Very hopeful but also very sad. The imagery is very powerful and the message, ultimately of hope, stays with you."

3RD PLACE



Judges' comments: "This was an excellent piece of storytelling moving through the challenges of a traumatic childhood, struggling to build a different, better life. Part poetry, part prose, you could really hear the writer's voice come through. A lovely piece."

New Beginning: Devils as Friends

New world, new life, new friends

Ever said to yourself:

Why start over again when your soul stopped following you a long time ago?

Before you, stands a big glass staircase that will lead to your death

Everyone tells you to “STOP! TURN BACK!”, but you ignored them

Got to go, even if you will come back here and ask yourself “Why did I go to them?”

Inside you, you feel like “I am stepping in the Heaven, where life is beautiful”

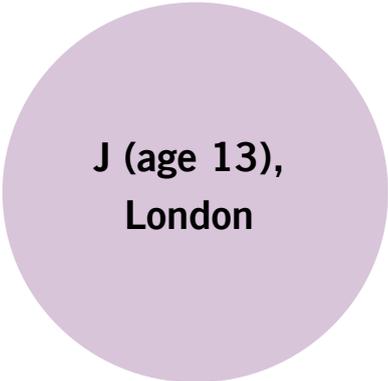
Not once you think what is going to happen in the future

New or Old doesn't matter

I need to stop you from going inside, but I can't, not without your support

New world, yes, but bitter life and evil devils as friends

Going back from where you started, you opened your arms to let devils and hatred overtake you.



**J (age 13),
London**

About Coram Voice

Coram Voice exists to enable and equip children and young people to express their views in all matters affecting them in and around the care system. Working to enable children have their views taken seriously helping to improve their experience of the care system.

About Voices

Voices is a platform for the voices of children in and around the care system. It aims to promote a positive image by showcasing young people's creativity and improving understanding of their experiences, in particular 'new beginnings' - what and who have given them opportunities for a fresh start.

The national writing competition was launched in 2016 to mark Coram Voice's 40th anniversary and in honour of our founder, Gwen James, who died in 2015. The competition is open to children in care and care leavers. This year, to combine with the launch of Coram's Young Citizen's Programme, we had a special prize for the best entry from a migrant young person.

About the Coram Voice National Advocacy Helpline

Children and young people, or others on their behalf, can call to access advice, information and direct advocacy support with problems they are facing. The helpline is staffed 9.30am to 6pm Monday to Friday, and can be contacted in a variety of ways. Visit our 'Talk to Us' page (www.coramvoice.org.uk/young-peoples-zone/talk-voice)

to find out more.



Voices

coram
Voice 
getting young voices heard



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