

Rising as Me: Overcoming Challenges, Transforming, and Finding Your Identity

Join members of the NiCC (Norfolk in Care Council) as they discuss this year's care leaver month theme and explore identity, resilience, and transformation through lived experience.

Inspired by themes like Echoes of Us, Beyond the System, and We Are More Than Statistics, the session amplifies the voices of young people with care experience.

Those attending will gain:

- Insight into the lived realities of care-experienced young people.
- Understanding of how identity and resilience are shaped in and beyond care.
- Inspiration to challenge stereotypes and support youth-led change.



**norfolk
in-care
council**
every one has a voice

Introductions



This year's theme is:

'Rising As Me: Overcoming challenges, transforming, and finding your identity'.

It speaks to the **resilience** that care experienced individuals show every day and also honours the personal growth and transformation that their journeys have inspired (and will continue to inspire).

This session is an opportunity to 'care'

Celebrate care leavers and care experienced individuals

Amplify their voices

Raise awareness of challenges

Encourage change in policy and practice



Hi, my name is Omar.

‘Care experience doesn’t define us, it will always be part of our story but also a part of our power’

Discussion – what do you think about this statement?

Blake's view



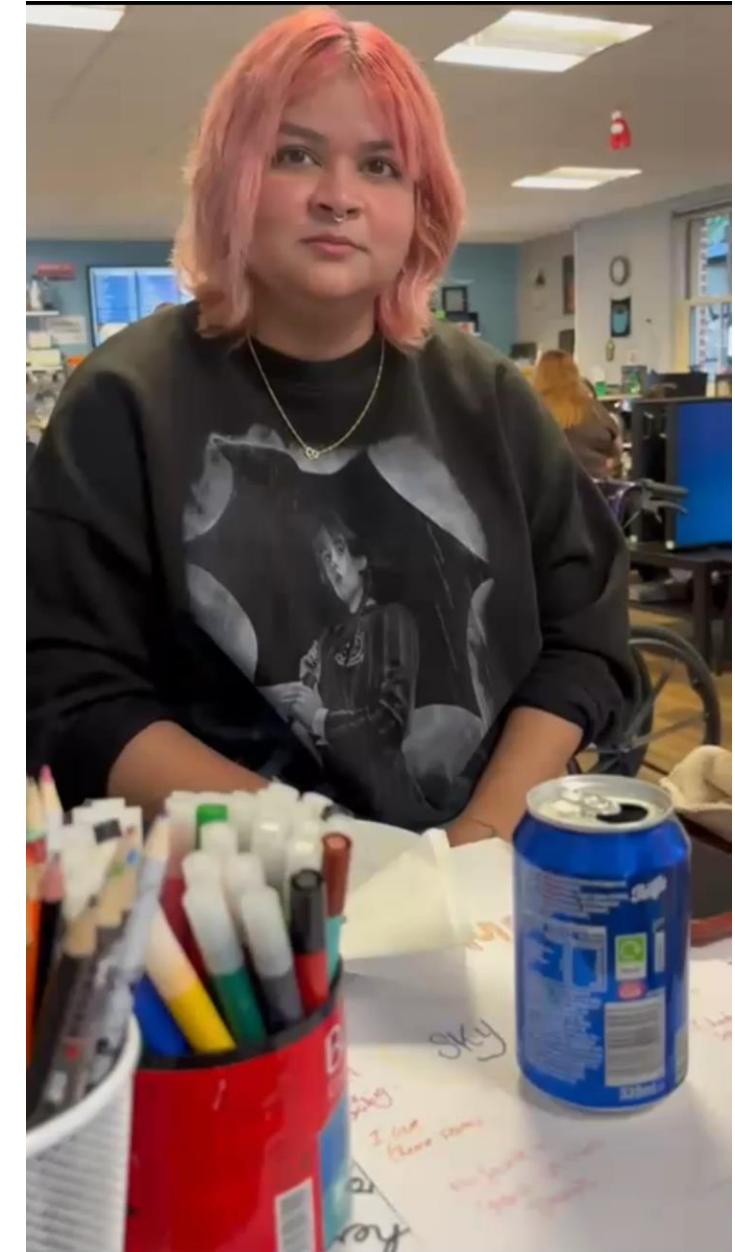
I believe that the future holds wonders
I believe that I am capable in different aspects of life
I believe that the world will become a better place for others including myself
I believe that I have a lot of potential
I believe that everyone is capable in different aspects of life
I believe that everyone has a chance at getting where they want to be but some disregard it
I believe that we are all capable of getting where we want to be
I believe that hard work shapes your future
I believe that some of us are disadvantaged but it makes us stronger overall
I believe that everyone has potential that can be manipulated for the greater good
I believe that we can all be put to our limits and we either sink or float in different situations
I believe that I am capable of achieving a lot even though it's been a challenge
I believe that we get what we work for
I believe that karma will show true lights for people
I believe that everything will be okay in the end
I believe that although life is challenging there is always a rainbow at the end of the storm
I believe that grey clouds hold weight like people and sometimes it needs to be let go
I believe that the world is challenging
I believe that the world will be a better place
I believe I have shaped the system to be a little bit better
I believe that some people struggle
I believe that people need help when its least expected

I believe - by Nicole

‘We are not fragile, nor made of glass’

‘Sometimes we will start believing we are fragile,
that’s not good!’

‘We are strong people, that should be recognised.’



Little room. Blue walls. Painted like a beach with gaudy chairs and gaudy people. Cut outs where faces should be and swimwear out of date.

I used to live on the beach.

I've been asked to pick up every grain of sand here at once. Not put them in a bucket, not sweep them somewhere else. Pick them all up. At once. At. Once.

Hurry up then.

Right. *Riiight.*

I stretch out the '*iiiiiiiiii*' and take a breath and then another breath.

I used to live on the beach

and I'd *dream* of living in a room like this

I guess.

I had to pick up the sand there, too. I knew I had to, even if nobody was telling me back then.

Somehow it felt easier.

I don't know whether it was the fact nobody was watching or if it was that I knew it was impossible.

Maybe,

I should ask somebody for help.

I'm sure I'll figure it out.



By
Suki

Jay (teenager, reflective):

I was thirteen when I got the call.
 "Pack your things," they said.
 I didn't have much—just a hoodie, a sketchbook, and a phone with a cracked screen.
 I didn't cry. Not then.
 I just kept thinking, Will this be the last time I see my little brother?

Lena (social worker, calm but weary):

I've made that call more times than I can count.
 Each time, I feel the weight of it.
 I see the fear in their eyes, the silence in the car ride.
 And I wonder—how do you explain to a child that this is supposed to help?

Mrs. Carter (foster carer, warm and firm):

When Jay arrived, he didn't speak for two days.
 He ate quietly, slept with the light on, and kept his shoes by the door.
 I didn't push.
 I just made sure he knew dinner was at six, the bathroom was his, and the dog wouldn't bite.
 Sometimes love starts with routine.

Jay:

I didn't trust her at first.
 I thought she'd send me back like the others.
 But she didn't.
 She let me be angry.
 She let me draw.
 She let me exist without asking for anything in return.

Lena:

Foster care isn't perfect.
 It's messy.
 It's full of broken systems and tired workers and kids who deserve more.
 But sometimes, you meet a Mrs. Carter.
 And suddenly, the world feels a little less cruel.

Mrs. Carter:

I'm not a hero.
 I've made mistakes.
 But I've learned that every child needs three things:
 Safety.
 Patience.
 And someone who believes in them—even when they don't believe in themselves.

Jay:

I still have bad days.
 But now, I have a place to come home to.
 I have someone who asks how my art is going.
 I have a voice.
 And I'm learning to use it.

Lena:

To the young people in care:
 You are not your file.
 You are not your trauma.
 You are a story still unfolding.

Mrs. Carter:

To the carers:
 Be the chapter they remember with warmth.
 Not because you fixed them—
 But because you saw them.

Jay:

And to everyone listening—
 Foster care isn't just about homes.
 It's about hearts.
 And mine is still healing.
 But it's beating strong.

By Alex

Connor on identity & choices

Our identity evolves. It's hard in care as we have not had support, family support. We do have choices, but choices are not always so simple, we are not always shown what will help us. Our personality and identity are shaped by our choices and we can find our identity through what we love.

Learning combat sports has shaped me. I got round a great group of people. Who you are around shapes your life. The physical element allows me to get anger out and gives me focus.

I have a purpose. I work at a gym and am training to be a PT. I am proud to get this job by being kind and speaking with people. This kills anxiety. Positively find a place where you enjoy what you do and there you will **meet** people that can help with your journey.

There is so much information available in audio books that people don't tap into. It gets good seeds into my brain. My recommendations are:

- It didn't start with you, how inherited family trauma shapes who we are and how to end the cycle – Mark Wolynn
- Zero Negativity – Ant Middleton
- Atomic Habits – James Clear
- Rich Dad, Poor Dad – Robert T Kiyosaki

What are you
most proud of?

Sixteen on Halloween - Alex

She was sixteen when she arrived. It was Halloween night.

From the backseat of the social worker's car, she watched children dart between houses, their costumes glowing under streetlights. Laughter echoed through the windows, but it felt distant—like a language she didn't speak.

The house she was taken to looked ordinary. The woman who answered the door seemed kind, but unfamiliar. Dinner was offered. She declined. That night, she sat on the floor of her new room, surrounded by silence and questions. The bed was made, but she didn't feel ready to lie in it. Weeks passed like that—trying to decode a world that didn't make sense.

English wasn't her second language. It wasn't even close.

She couldn't understand most of what the carer said. The social worker spoke in clipped phrases and acronyms that felt like riddles. She knew she was far from her family, far from everything she understood. And she was devastated.

The food was different. The routines were different. Even the way people smiled felt unfamiliar. She didn't know how to ask for help without sounding like a burden. She didn't know how to explain that she wasn't just new to the house—she was new to the entire system.

It took time.
Time to learn the language.
Time to learn that she could say no.
That she could ask for different food.
That she could wear the clothes from her country and not feel out of place.
It took time to understand that they were trying to help.
To see that her foster carer saw her—not just the paperwork, not just the silence.
To realise that the world wasn't against her, even if it felt like it at first.

She learned to be curious.
To keep an open mind.
To ask questions.
To find her voice.
She learned to let go of the mask she wore to survive.
To find a way of living in a world that felt strange, and slowly—beautiful.
She learned to enjoy it.
To find happiness in small things.
She learned to let people live their lives without carrying the weight of their choices.
She learned that it's okay to make mistakes.
That it's okay to feel awful sometimes.
That it's okay to want to run away from everything—and still stay.

She's twenty-two now.
She has her own place. Her own family.
She's doing better than she ever imagined at sixteen.

There are days she still looks back—
on the journey,
on the struggle,
on the people who stepped into her life and helped her find her way.

She learned to understand.
To take in what was offered.
Some bonds broke along the way.
But new families were formed.
New friendships grew from places she never expected.

She learns something about herself every day.
And she's still learning.

The system taught her that she wasn't alone.
She met other care-experienced young people who made it all feel worthwhile.
She met workers who changed the direction of her life.
She found a place she could call home—and people who made it all seem better, somehow.

Dear Ameena

I know you're sitting in the back of a car right now, Halloween lights flickering past the window, and your heart pounding like a drum. You feel like you've been dropped into another world, one where everyone speaks a language you don't understand and lives by rules you can't see.

You think you're alone. You believe that no one can fathom the weight of fear and hope tangled in your chest. But I want you to know you are not invisible. Every question you whisper in your mind matters. Every tear you swallow is a seed of strength you'll one day harvest.

It's okay to be scared. It's okay to refuse dinner when your stomach twists in knots. It's okay to sit in silence, to test the stillness of a room that isn't yours yet. That silence will become the canvas on which you'll paint your future.

You will learn the words you need. Step by step, stumbling through strange phrases, you'll find your voice. You will discover that asking "Why?" and "Why not?" can change the world around you. When people finally hear those questions, they'll start to see you.

There will be days when you want to run back to what you know, even if what you know hurts. You'll learn that running away never solves anything—your courage lies in turning toward help, even when help feels foreign.

I promise you this: the kindness you feel tonight is real. Some doors that open for you will lead to confusion, but others will open into rooms where you can be yourself. There are people waiting to celebrate your mistakes, share your laughter, and hold your hand when the dark feels endless.

You will grow. You will break and rebuild. You will learn that home isn't just a place—it's the people who choose you, time and again, even when you're at your worst.

Hold on to curiosity. Let your questions light the way. And remember, even in the darkest Halloween night, there's a spark of possibility just beyond the next doorstep.

With all my love and belief in you,

Alex at Twenty-Two