

Listening, Learning, Leading

What we've learned

Children and Young People's Voices (2005–2025)
Institute of Child Protection Studies (ICPS)





The Importance of Listening

This was the first time that anyone, in ages, had asked “how are you going?” Hundreds of people go through our house every month and they all ask me how my Mum is but you know what? I cant remember the last time someone asked me if I was OK, if I needed help. I kinda feel invisible – in my own house.” (Finding their Way Home, 2007)

“We want a say in what happens,
not just to be told what’s decided.”

(Taking Us Seriously, 2015)

“Cos just talking to people takes a big load off your chest, like a huge weight is lifted off you. So there does need to be more people. Because its hard to talk to people, you’ve got to trust them a lot ... there are not many people that I can trust, that I can tell.”

(16-year-old male, Who Cares? 2009)

“They talk to the parent but it’s not the parent... they’d be more helpful if they listened to what the kids had to say because this kind of stuff really affects them badly because they’re young and because they don’t understand. They pretty much go “holy crap, my whole life is falling apart. What do I do?”

(Who Cares? 2009)

“Adults and youth think about different things when they’re trying to work out what’s going on. I think adults make a quick judgment while we watch, look out for things more. Adults probably have more experience so they can decide quicker but that doesn’t mean they don’t make mistakes. Maybe because we’re watching we see things they don’t see.”

(YP-4; Taking Us Seriously, 2014)

“Every school should do what we just did [in the focus group]. Talk about what risks there are and if it’s a big risk and what’s been done and what we think should be done. How else can they find out what young adults think and how can we hear what’s been done?”

(YP-3; Taking Us Seriously, 2015)

“Well, a good [worker] is like one that is, just listens...Bad one is more like that wants to know every detail. Sorry that really bugged me as a child, I was like I don’t want to have to explain, [they] want to know every detail or they tell someone else and you’re like ‘I didn’t want you to do that’, or umm, they cut you off or like try to tell you what’s right and what’s wrong.”

“[This is]
Monkey. He is
special...
Sometimes
when [I’m] sad [I]
cuddle him.”

(Boy, aged 10, Finding their way
home)



“We know what’s going wrong — we just don’t get asked.”

(Taking Us Seriously, 2015)

“If workers listened to us more, they’d know how to help.”

(Chasing Safety, 2024)

“It shouldn’t just be adults fixing things — we should get to help.”

(Safe and Sound, 2016)

“If children and young people aren’t involved in stuff like this, then there’s no insight into the mishaps and mistreatments that happen within these institutions. Therefore, there can be no change if you’re not speaking directly to victims and sufferers of what goes on.”

(Young man in hospital, Take Notice, Believe Us & Act, 2024)

“I’d feel proud if something I said
made it better for the next kid.”

(Nowhere to Go, 2023)

“Ask what helps before you decide
what’s best for us.”

(Safe and Sound, 2016)

“The world is unsafe for most kids, well that’s how they feel anyway. So if you’re going to make it safe you’ve got to make them feel OK... You have to ask them what worries them and fix that.”

(Taking us Seriously, 2013)

“Adults think they know what kids need to be safe, but I don’t think that they do. They base it on what they remember from when they were kids and the world is different now. So they need to talk to kids and find out what it means to them.”

(Taking Us Seriously, 2015)

“Adults should ask what’s working and what’s not, instead of thinking they already know.”

(Chasing Safety, 2024)

“If you have an animal,
you can talk to the
animal and they will
always just listen and
not say things like
“you’re ugly” and stuff”

(9-year-old girl, Finding their Way Home, 2007)



“It’d be good if they listened to kids who’ve been through it before making new rules.”

(Taking Us Seriously, 2015)

“We should be part of helping fix things — not just waiting for someone else to do it.”

(Safe and Sound, 2016)

“When people take your ideas seriously, you start to believe you can change things.”

(Me, Myself and I, 2013)



What Children Value From Those Who Work with Them

“One of the people
[at the refuge]
always talked to me,
they were like my
friend— that was
good.”

(Girl, aged 11, Finding their Way
Home, 2007)



“At [one refuge], the workers would talk to the kids as well as the parents but at others they didn’t. It was good when they talked to you – treated you like a person. If they just ignored you it made you feel weird.”

(Boy, aged 11, Finding their Way Home, 2009)

“I wish someone had stepped in when I was a kid, and like helped out. I shouldn’t have gone through all that shit and have suffered the way we did. I dunno why they waited until things were so bad they couldn’t be fixed. If they’d helped get Mum on track heaps earlier it would’ve been OK. I don’t reckon that things would be like perfect but they wouldn’t be as bad as what they are.”

(Young man, aged 21, Who Cares, 2009)

“Relationships matter most — safety is felt through trust.”

(Safe and Sound, 2016)

“You want someone who is committed to the job, and is actually there to help. Not something that you can’t just walk into and go like ‘I’ve got qualifications at TAFE. I’m a youth worker.’ It’s not like that anymore...You got to have a worker who knows how to reach inside someone and go ‘look, I am not gonna hurt you, I am not gonna tell other people ‘bout ya, I am not gonna put judgment and criticism on ya, I am gonna help ya to the best of my ability. What do ya want? What do you need?...tell me everything I need to know – and to have trust. I wish I had someone like that because I need it bad”.

(Lost in Translation, 2009)

“In my eyes, I saw her as a good worker. [She] was the best one...She helped me out and stuff. When I was getting in trouble, when I was good she helped me out. She took me home to my place on the first night. I was real scared and I didn't have no one to help me get there. And she helped me to get stuff, for my house. Groceries and stuff. And she stayed around and helped cos she knew I didn't have that much confidence and stuff. No one had done that kinda thing for me before.”

“Belonging heals — connection
gives hope.”

(Me, Myself and I, 2013)

“Good workers don’t just tell you
what to do — they do it with you.”

(Safe and Sound, 2016)

“You can tell when someone’s there because they care, not because it’s their job.”

(Taking Us Seriously, 2015)

“I don’t cry in front of my parents or friends. I cry in my pillow. I cry with my dog and he licks my face.”

(Female young carer, 12 years, Attendance, Achievement and Participation, 2007)

“You lose everything inside. You get out and you don’t know how to do shit anymore. And everyone expects you to do stuff for yourself and you’re like really wanting to do it but sometimes you just don’t know how. And it freaks you out and you start stressing and then you get all angry at yourself and then you can’t do stuff even if you wanna. You kinda need someone just saying, ‘yeah that’s it’, not doing it for you but like letting you know you’re doing the right thing or going ‘how about you try this’ and helping you cos its completely different out, hey. Nothing like inside. And the longer you’re in the harder it is.”

(YP9, Lost in Transition, 2012)

“She helps me out with a lot of stuff.
She’s always there when I need
something and she’s nice to me.”

(Chloe, 17, Fostering Recognition, 2025)

“Everyone just needs to start listening to the young person themselves ... Kids need to be heard.”

(YP#2, Chasing Safety, 2024)

“Sometimes the only thing I wanted was for someone to just sit down and listen to me.”

(Girl, aged 14, Who Cares? 2009)

“If you’ve got a worker you can trust,
then you can talk about stuff before it
gets bad.”

(Safe and Sound, 2016)

“When you know someone actually cares about you, you feel safe — not just because there’s cameras or rules.”

(Taking Us Seriously, 2015)

“Actually having someone actually care about you is a good feeling and I hadn’t had that for years...it was actually a big shock and a wake-up call to me that by hurting myself I wasn’t just hurting myself, I was hurting someone else and so that kind of hit me. It was like, wow, it actually happens to someone that actually cares about you and what you do with your life is a huge thing.”

(23-year-old male, Me Myself and I, 2015)

“I wanted someone to just check if I was okay, not just tell me the rules.”

(Chasing Safety, 2024)

“My caseworker was the only one who didn’t give up on me. Even when I stuffed up, she still came back.”

(Fostering Recognition, 2025)

“I went to heaps of youth services: refuges, centres, programs. **No one ever really asked about what was going on at home.** I think they just assumed that things were shit and that I couldn’t live at home. They didn’t really have much of an idea about why things were bad and what needed fixing. If they’d sussed it out, maybe things could’ve been worked out and I could’ve gone back home. But they never asked and I never knew that there was stuff that they could do. What a waste!”

(Who Cares? 2015)

“When people actually listen to you,
it feels safe — even if what you’re
saying isn’t.”

(Residential-care participant, Safe and Sound, 2016)

“I like my teacher... she encourages me... what really makes me happy.”

(Jayden, 17, Fostering Recognition, 2025)

“When people believe you and help you fix it, you start to trust again.”

(Nowhere to Go, 2023)

“When you’re in care, you want someone to say, ‘you’re part of us now,’ not ‘you’re here till you stuff up.’”

(Fostering Recognition, 2025)

“You can’t heal if you keep being moved. You need to stay somewhere long enough to feel safe.”

(Safe and Sound, 2016)



What Gets in the Way?

“I’m too proud to ring [a telephone support line], but I eventually did start ringing ‘em. But as I thought all along they didn’t do anything for me... they seemed to think they couldn’t. I’d ring em all day, everyday. They said the same thing: ‘ring these people they’ll help you out’. I rang those people – they couldn’t do nothing. What can you do? I can give you a number for another place that won’t help you out I guess.”

(Young man, aged 16, Who cares?)

“If you make a mistake, they move you — they don’t help you fix it.”

(Nowhere to Go, 2023)

“Dude, it’s all about power. While us kids are powerless adults can do whatever they like and organisations and systems or whatever are gonna fail us. Until we recognise that kids are vulnerable because of how they’re seen and treated and until adults are accountable not only for us but to us, nothings gonna change.”

(Notice, Believe and Act, 2024)

“They expect us to put in so much effort, its such a drain, but then they don’t do anything with it.”

(They’ve gotta listen, 2013)



“Why would adults listen to kids? There’s too much at stake for them to take a child’s side. And there’s no responsibility for them, like what’s going to happen if a child’s let down. Probably nothing!”

(Taking us seriously, 2015)

“I told them what was happening, but they didn’t believe me. That’s when I stopped talking.”

(Finding Their Way Home, 2007)

“There’s too many rules and not enough people who actually care.”

(Safe and Sound, 2016)

“Workers change all the time, so you have to start your story over again.”

(Chasing Safety, 2024)



What Children Would Like from the Child Protection System

“I want to go somewhere safe.
Somewhere people care about
me ... a carer I can talk to when I
don't feel safe.”

(Girl, aged 10–12, Safe and Sound, 2016)

“We believe that the young people are the ones that are going to be affected most by this stuff so they should have a right to say.”

(Young woman, 17–20, Safe and Sound, 2016)

“Just treat us like a friend over a job.
Actually build connections ... you just
become a piece of paper.”

(YP#7, Chasing Safety, 2024)

“They need to listen and act — not just say they care.”

(Safe and Sound participant, 2016)



Why Children Would Like to Shape Policy and Practice

“I think workers should rely more on young people. We know what is going on, we know what it’s like, we know what works and we know what is going to work ... If young people know that workers have learned what to do from us kids, I reckon they’d be more like ... to go along with it. It makes sense – but I don’t think they’d even think about asking us.”

(Young man, 17–20, Safe and Sound, 2015)

“It takes guts to tell your story —
especially when you don’t know if
anyone will care.”

“Kids should be asked about stuff that’s got to do with them...They can tell you stuff you’d never think of – ‘cos you’re not a kid.”

(11-year-old boy, Finding their Way Home)



“Even if the topic might have negatively affected me... I’d still get involved to help out other people.”

(MESSI, 2017)

“Providing opportunities for children to have some control and exert influence has been found to positively influence wellbeing.”

(Safe and Sound, 2016)

“Kids will see that adults want to hear from them... and will come forward because they know adults are taking it seriously.”

(YP-2, Taking Us Seriously, 2015)

“There should be stuff for kids: people they can talk to about stuff and not worry that people are going to think bad of their parents or get them in trouble.

Kids won't tell unless they know people are safe and they're not going to help unless they think people are going to do something to help.”

(Young man, aged 14, Who Cares?)



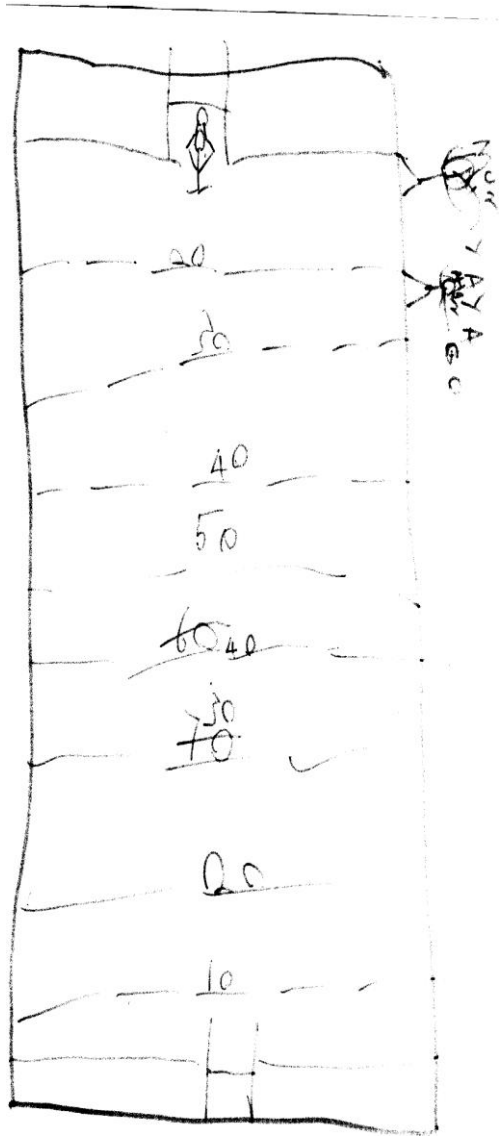
What They Value about Their Parents or Families

“So it was really hard because every kid was teasing me and they're like “I'm going to see my mum this weekend, what are you doing?” and then I'd be like “I don't know” and they'd be like “well at least I get to see my mum” and then it'd just be really hard especially because there's lots of bullies in primary school and high school.”

(Rebecca 15 years, Children of Prisoners, 2018)

“I know what a shit life is like and I’m going to make sure my son doesn’t have to go through that. I’m going to be a better parent because I’m totally committed to making sure he has a better life than me.”

(Lost in Transition, 2009)



I feel most like a family when my Mum and [my sister] call out my name from the sidelines [at footy].

Here [in the picture] they are screaming out 'Go for it' – and there's my Mum all proud - that's when I know we're a family!

(Boy, aged 12, Finding their Way Home, 2007)

“You don't want the same thing that happened to you, to happen to that kid, do you... Like, you're going to have to live your life for your kid. You don't want the same thing that happened to you, to happen to that kid, do you? And so — and I was, like, hell, no, [I'm] definitely not [ready to be a parent].”

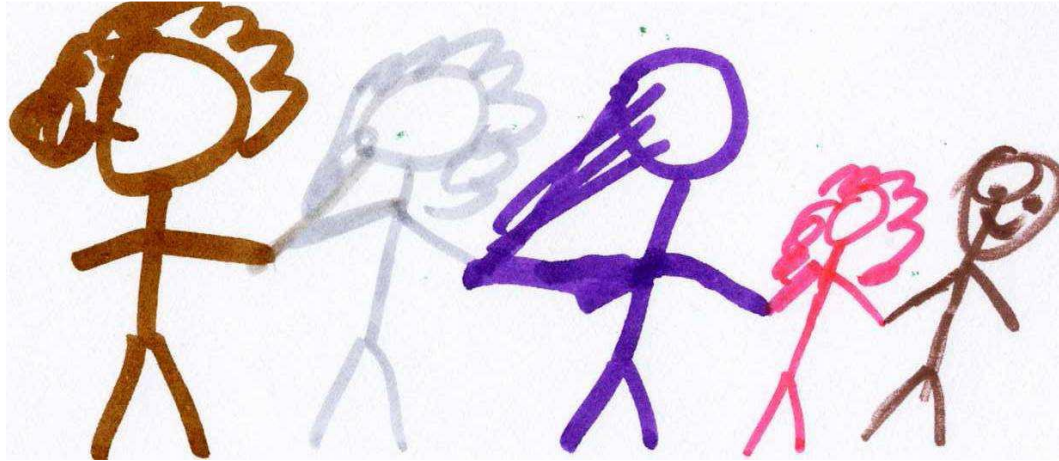
(Father, 20, Young Parents Aspirations, 2022)

“Having a kid – makes you think different about stuff. I don’t wanna get caught up in stuff so I can be there with him, be a good role model...”

(Lost in Transition, 2009)

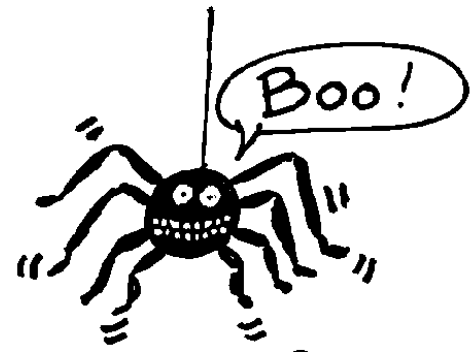
“The reason I’m so strong is because of my Mum. My Mum helped us go through lots of hard stuff. My Dad was never around so there’s no one else. Family’s what gets you through.”

(Finding their Way Home, 2007)



“I think my family is really great. We stick together no matter what.”

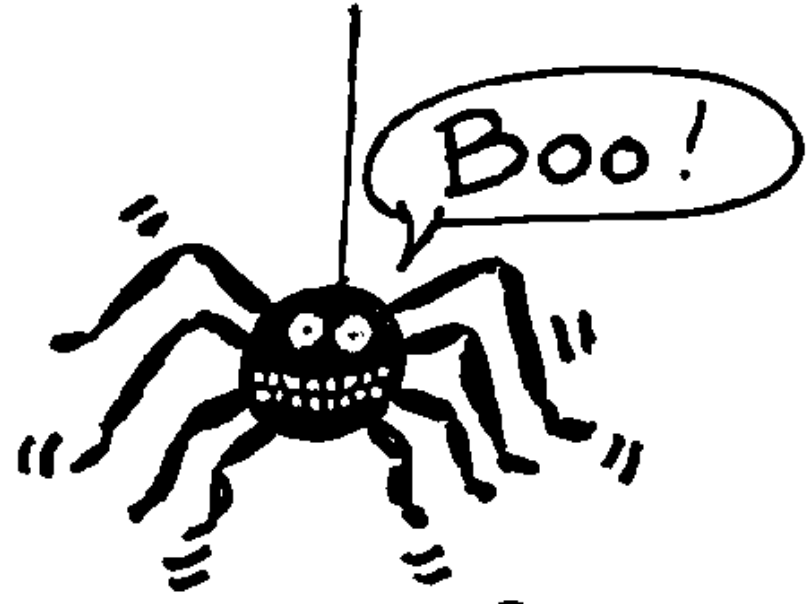
(Boy, aged 10, Finding their Way Home, 2007)



“I think we moved into this other house that had stairs and there was this big spider once and it was that big and every morning it was on the door and we all used to be creeped out because only at night it moved and we didn’t know where it was in the morning. And one time it was in Mum’s room on the cupboard door and she was like ‘aaargh’ because it was there and she couldn’t get changed ...

.... But my Mum wouldn't've if she is like she is now because she likes spiders now. She's tougher now that she's had to do stuff like leave Dad and make a new home and stuff."

(Boy, aged 9, Finding their Way Home, 2007)



“Both of my parents are drug dealers and alcoholics and when my mum and dad went to prison, I didn't want to talk to anyone because I thought I would be the only kid that didn't have a mum and dad.”

(Rebecca, 15 years, Children of Prisoners, 2018)

“Even though things were bad at home and I had to leave you know, you’ve got that bond. They’re there. **You have this longing, you know, to be with them** for things to get better to be a family again. So even though you’re all ‘fuck ‘em’, they mean something to you and people need to know that. Build on that. And you kinda hope they [your family] feels the same.”

(Child, Who Cares? 2009)

Q: I want to talk about the things that you need to make you and your family strong? What things can you think of?

A: I've got lots of them, confident, happiness, and 'caringness'.

(F18 C Female, 12 yrs, Experiences of resettlement, 2016)

“I think what binds us [our family] together is love, so if anything comes and we [our family] understand that this is life and we love each other, that keeps us together and things happen, we do understand that things happen but keeps us together.”

(F2 C Male, 17 yrs, Experiences of Resettlement, 2016)

Q: What makes your family a good family?

A: That we help each other.

Q: In what ways do you help each other?

A: If mum needs help with something, I help her with it. If I need to get something, she gets it for me.

(F22 C Male, 11 yrs, Experiences of Resettlement, 2016)



“I didn’t know that I would have to move from my Mum’s place... I thought it was good that I got to choose.”

(Girl, 11, Finding Their Way Home, 2007)

“It’s good when workers help you see family, even if it’s messy — it shows they know that’s part of who you are.”

(Chasing Safety, 2024)

“So [my friend] is like a sister I never had pretty much. So she's always been there for me so I mainly came back to her... she is pretty much the same situation as mine, so we talk about it all the time, we compare our dads and how much of arseholes they are to us. It's good to have someone there who knows what you're going through.”

(Julie, 15 years, Strengthening Relationships, 2025)

“They put me with [one young person] because we liked similar things. We both had the same kind of similar personalities ... They put [another young person] in this house because [he and the other resident] were really good friends before [he] even moved in. Then they thought they were like “oh yeah, [I] would like him” kind of thing. We ended up getting along pretty much straight away.”

(Young woman, aged 17–20, Safe and Sound)

“They start talking to me. They start asking me what I like. We start doing things together. Like we start cooking dinner, all that kind of stuff. So things that we both like and we talk as well. We get to know each other, I guess. That way, I can know a little bit more about them and they can know a little bit more about me. That way, I feel a whole lot more safer.”

(Young woman, aged 17–20, Safe and Sound, 2015)

My hopes for the Future

Sometimes we don't know what is going to happen in the future, but we can help you think about it



Our Hopes for the Future



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“There’s got to be something out there in life that’s for me. I may not know it now, but there’s got to be something.”

(Female, 23, Me, Myself and I, 2013)



“When someone says, ‘I believe you,’ it feels like you can breathe again.”

“Hope is very important in someone’s life.”

(Female, 21, Me, Myself and I, 2013)

“It gives you the satisfaction, the pride to be able to go, I did this and I’m proud I did this.”

(Male, 19, Me, Myself and I, 2013)

“When someone listens and doesn’t judge, you start to think maybe you can get better.”

(Chasing Safety, 2024)

“One thing that I’ve noticed throughout all these years, is no-one ever asks you what make you happy, ever. Throughout all those years, I’ve never been asked. Someone has never sat down and said; ‘What makes you happy?’”

(23-year-old male, Me Myself and I)

“If you're not happy yourself, how are you supposed to be healthy or, you know, know who you are or have employment and stuff like that? everything else doesn't really, to me, matter as much. As long as I'm happy in the long run. I know [from being in care] that when you aren't happy that's when things tend to go downhill more rapidly than they should be or when they are ...

(Father, 20, Young Parent's Aspirations, 2022)

“I've just found when I made that decision, myself, to not be bitter about my circumstances or what had happened to me and instead, be happy, um, things started to go better and then started to get somewhere in life. I mean I got my employment and stuff like that. So yeah, I think that's my biggest thing for me.”

(Father, 20, Young Parent's Aspirations, 2022)

“I’ve never had anyone ask me what I want as a future.”

(21-year-old female, Me Myself & I, 2013)

“Even more than somewhere to stay I need something to believe in, someone to believe in me.”

(16-year-old male, Me, Myself & I, 2013)

“It helps when they see you for who you could be, not just what you’ve done.”

(Fostering Recognition, 2025)

“I wanted to be able to stand on my own two feet and prove I could do better than my parents.”

(Male, 23, Young People's Aspirations, 2020)

“[To achieve my goals, I need] just having someone there that could really support me, writing [my dreams] down and then going, ‘Okay, how can we achieve it? How can we make it into reality?’ And basically, maybe helping me along the way, like not writing them down and just throwing them out sort of thing, or just pushing them to the side, making sure that I actually do it.”

(Male, 22, Young People’s Aspirations)

“Knowing who you are [is important now], because when I was younger, I did feel lost. There were a lot of times where I tried to find myself with trying different things and moving out of home, seeing if that would help myself.”

(Young man, 25, Young People's Aspirations, 2020)

“When I get out of detention, I’m going to stay at home] Look after my brother. He keeps me distracted. He’s only 4. He doesn’t really understand it. It’s screwed up to see his face when he walks in a place like this. My sister understands it. She hates it. She gets over it and comes in here but it f**ks up our relationship. She looks at me different. I wanna just go on with life and not do anything wrong.”

(Young man, Lost In Transition, 2015)

“If we show others that it's possible to dream big and still be a good parent, it can make a huge difference.”

(Younger Mum, Young People's Aspirations, 2022).

“Our stories are too hard, you’ve got to laugh about it or you’re just gonna cry... But you gotta talk about it. And people’ve gotta listen ... and do something about it!”

(They’ve Gotta Listen, 2015)



“Everyone thinks we’re broken, but we just need time and people who believe in us.”

(Me, Myself and I, 2013)