



HARRY'S STORY

DECISION MAKING

A CASE STUDY



BACKGROUND

Harry is a care leaver. He recently graduated from university. As a child, it was recommended by social work and agreed by the children's panel that Harry shouldn't live at home. Harry's family didn't agree with this decision and made constant appeals to overturn it. **Harry wasn't sure if he agreed either.** This meant that he had to attend regular children's hearings - as frequently as every three weeks - where **the same conversations were repeated and the same decisions were made.** Harry found these hearings frustrating as he didn't understand some of the language being used. To him, as a young teenager, **it seemed like jargon.**

“ So there would be times I'd go to a meeting and panel members would say things to me like “Oh, you should be on this side of the table!”. Which, to them could come across as a compliment and something really nice to say, and in a way it was complimenting my intelligence or whatever, but you shouldn't need to be putting yourself across like an adult as a twelve or thirteen-year-old.

Harry met with social workers, panel members and other adults in many formal meeting settings. He felt that the adults around him used appropriate language when addressing him directly, but that many of the important decisions were made in the conversations between social workers and teachers and residential staff - and in a language he couldn't understand. He felt as though he had no control over the decision making process, so decided to **take it upon himself** to learn more about the processes and language, **ensuring that his voice was heard.**



He found the formality around decision making processes intimidating, but **wanted his voice to be heard** when making big decisions like how often he would see his family or where he would go to school. He felt as though he was partly involved in decision making, both formally and informally, but that pushing his involvement was difficult and self-taught.



OUTCOMES

Harry feels that his experience could have been improved. He was given compliments on his self-taught understanding of processes, but feels that **he should not have had to express himself in adult terms at such a young age**. He feels that the voices of care experienced young people should be listened to, and that decisions should be made in a language they **understand**.



I don't want someone to have to be exceptional to be heard. I want someone to be able to go into their first panel and be really shy and really quiet...or to have a young person go into a panel and know that maybe they're not going to like the decision that is going to be made and to be quite annoyed and quite angry at times. I still want those people to be able to go into a meeting and be happy that they've been heard or at least have understood what's going on.



It is important that young people's feelings are **valued and respected**, taking into account the emotional impact that decision making can have. He thinks it's important to support young people throughout the formal processes which go into making these decisions, **alleviating the fear** around making definitive choices in formal settings. Harry made sure he was listened to at these meetings by learning about the systems and processes, talking in adult terms from a young age. He felt empowered through education, as it was the one aspect of his life in which he felt like **he had control**.

ACTION POINTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Ensure that children, young people and families are not subjected to **stressful repetition of information** or **avoidable delay** in decision making processes.
- Understand that children's hearings can be **stressful processes** for children and young people and provide **appropriate support** before, during and after the hearing.
- Make sure that children's hearings and other meetings are as accessible as possible, in terms of their **format, style and language**.
- Ensure that all looked after children and young people have a **real say** in the decisions which affect their lives, supporting them to fully exercise their right to express their views at children's hearings and other meetings, **listening to these and taking them seriously**.

