



Video: Police Scotland – Karen’s Story

Kareen: The circumstance that led to me being taken into care was that my Dad was in and out of jail quite a lot when I was younger and throughout my life. My Mum and Dad were also heroin addicts as well which led to me having to take care of my brother for quite a long time and basically, I think we should’ve had a social worker in a lot faster than we did, we only had a few visits, but they didn’t see the red flags, so it continued to happen.

Title: Before Kareen was taken into care, life at home reached crisis point following a particularly dangerous incident.

Kareen: The breaking point for my Dad was that he had a break down when I was 11, he stopped taking heroin and his methadone as well. So, he was back to reality and couldn’t handle it and he ended up dragging me and my Mum across the road in front of cars and the Police had to get phoned, it went to court, and he got charged with breach of the peace and domestic violence.

Title: Following the incident, Kareen was taken by her Mum to live with her Gran, but the placement proved to be busy and chaotic.

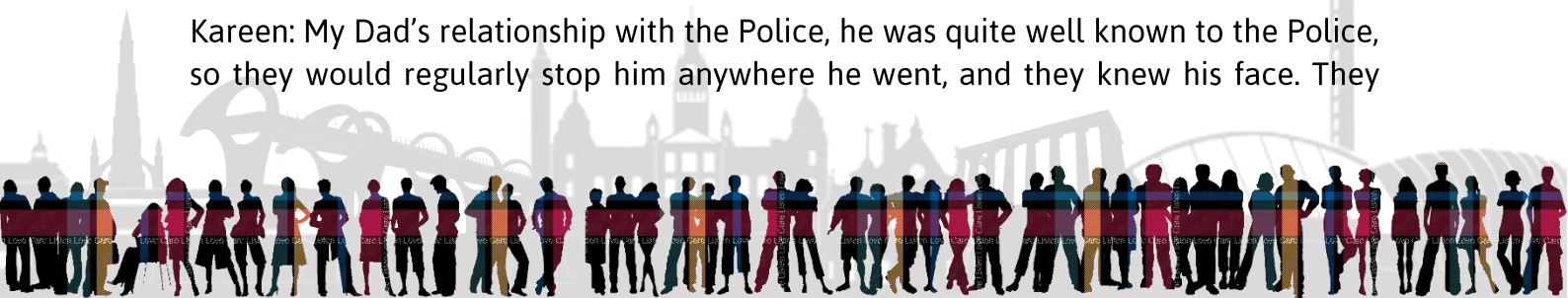
Kareen: It was good at my Grans because everybody was always there, but it was really loud and chaotic. And there was a lot of stages, there was a lot of busts and that, that would happen in my Grans house because my Grans side and my Granddad’s, their brothers and sisters were in to drugs quite a lot and quite hard drugs, so the Police would be around regularly. And then a few years after that, my Gran couldn’t really cope, I started drinking when I was 11/12/13 and I ended up moving into my Auntie’s house because she couldn’t cope any more.

Title: Living at her Aunt’s house, Kareen got the support she needed to begin to process her experiences and address issues with her mental health.

Kareen: My Aunty really helped me a lot, in the start she was really good. She works with the community in the council, so she had a lot of opportunities for me. I had really bad mental health at the time, she tried to help me in any way she could. She took me to Africa as well and that was the lightbulb moment where I realised that it’s not that bad and people have it a lot worse than me. I was really badly self-harming and I was suicidal at points and I did attempt it a few times and I just think it wasn’t fair at the time, on her. I did feel guilty because I didn’t really need to be there, and she didn’t need to take me in, but she did and now she has to deal with all this as well.

Title: Kareen and her brother witnessed a number of incidents of Police involvement in the lives of their family members as they were growing up. These incidents were often unsettling.

Kareen: My Dad’s relationship with the Police, he was quite well known to the Police, so they would regularly stop him anywhere he went, and they knew his face. They





occasionally stopped him when we were going to school or if we were just going to family and stuff like that. It was easy for them to just wait until he'd went wherever he was going instead of causing chaos in front of me and my brother because it does affect you later on, seeing your Dad who is being huckled to the ground and not understanding why. My Dad basically did everything for us, so I just seen my Dad as getting taken away by the Police for no reason and that just made me lose trust in the Police because I don't understand what is going on and nobody explained it to me, so I don't see why, if I am in an emergency, I should phone the Police because in my life it's just been chaos whenever they have been involved.

Because of my family members involvement with the Police quite a lot there would often be Police cars outside of the house and if they would knock on the door you would know it was them because of the knock, it was loud, and nobody would really answer the door because they knew what was coming. My family members had involvement with the Police quite a lot and it wasn't dealt with in an appropriate manor I don't think because one of my family members had a stroke, they were quite drunk but he can't really speak so they can't really understand what he is saying and instead of just being calm they decided to use force and pinned him up against the wall, but he had a stroke so he can't actually move his left side and they brought him home to my Grans and he was in quite a bad state and seeing that, it did affect me because your uncle who is poorly is getting battered really, in your eyes, and it makes you not trust the Police even more than I already did.

Title: Kareen remembers vividly and unsettling experience she had being stopped by a local Police officer.

Kareen: My experiences growing up, where I grew up, it wasn't the most pleasant with Police, they would regularly stop you if you were in groups more than three because they just automatically suspected you of drinking, no matter what age you were or how old you looked. We would regularly get stopped, even if we were just heading to the park and I remember one time we got stopped going to the park around the corner from my house and then the Police, I was with my friends, one knew I was in kinship care and one didn't, the Police officers said to us, what is your name and where do you stay? So, I told them I stay there, and they asked me who I stayed with. I told them I stay with my Gran. He then asked me why I stay with my Gran, I then got a bit defensive and cheeky because one person there knew why I stayed with my Gran and I didn't want to reveal it was because my parents were heroin addicts, so that's why I got a bit cheeky. He took my round to the house and basically, I went in and he said to me "think yourself luck that your Gran took you in, she didn't need to do that, you could've ended up in a home". I found that quite awful to be honest, I couldn't believe it.

Title: Kareen feels that the obvious and heavy Police involvement in her family's lives was stigmatizing and that it set her apart from her peers.





Karen: The rest of the people knowing how badly involved with the Police my family were, it was quite bad because I could easily get bullied for it, which I did. And, on the other side, people don't talk to you because of it, because they are scared and don't want to get involved, even though you are not involved. And it's just a black mark on your name, even though you haven't done anything yet.

Title: In her community, Karen felt that there was little consistency in the approach taken by local Police officers when working with young people.

Karen: The Police where we stayed, they had weird relationships with young people because some people knew the ones who were ok, and you could have a laugh with and you knew, by name really, who would stop you and search you for no reason just to do it. A few times we would be stopped twice or three times a day. From what I remember, I've been stopped at least 100-200 times that I can remember and that's just stopping and getting my name. It makes you wonder why and why they don't trust you, it's kind of pointless really to stop teenagers who actually not doing anything wrong. And because of the previous abuse that I have experienced, being searched by a guy was not the most pleasant experience and that was one of the reasons that I went into care because of historic abuse so it was really unpleasant and made me feel quite uncomfortable.

Title: Police Scotland is a named corporate parent under the Children and Young People Act 2014 (Scotland). As an employee of Police Scotland, YOU are a corporate parent to Scotland's care experienced children and young people.

Karen has some reflections on her own experiences to share. Which she hopes will inspire Police Scotland to make the most of the incredible opportunity presented by corporate parenting.

Karen: So, my ask for Police as corporate parents to young people is, treat young people are you would like to be treated, speak to them like you would like to be spoken to, just treat them like a person as though you weren't wearing a uniform. Search people who you suspect have illegal stuff on them, not people on the street or 13-year-old lassies who are out with their pals. Just be respectful to people's families and where they come from because it can create a lot of problems for that person whether it be bullying or anything else. Remove young people from potentially traumatising and frightening situations because seeing a family member being huckled or forced down to the ground, it stays with you and it's not a nice situation to be in.

