You can help children in care look forward to Christmas again

Dear Supporter

I hope you’re looking forward to Christmas like my family and me. I think it’s a time when everyone, especially children, should feel loved and safe. Unfortunately, as a project worker for The Children’s Society, I meet many children in care who find Christmas and the run up to it extremely traumatic and upsetting.

This was certainly the case for Liam last year. His story is something I’m sure you’ll want to hear about. As someone who thinks about those less fortunate at Christmas, it shows how your donation of £20 today could help transform the life of a child in care.

The death of Liam’s mum meant Christmas would never be the same again

It was February 2011 when Liam’s mum died from breast cancer and he started to live with his older sister. Left to fend for himself, Liam often went hungry. His clothes weren’t washed. And he started to miss school to hang out with a gang of much older boys who carried knives.

Feeling lonely and unloved, Liam didn’t see the danger he put himself in by staying out all night in parks and sleeping over on friends’ sofas. All he wanted to do was belong somewhere. Thankfully, Liam’s absence from school and changing behaviour didn’t go unnoticed.

Just a week before his tenth birthday he was placed in care: his sister unable to look after him. For Liam this was a big upheaval. He’s told me he was physically sick for two weeks from the stress of having to move in with people he didn’t know. And like many children in care, he ran away to try to escape his problems.

Eventually, after lots of tears and reassurance from his foster parents, Liam began to settle into his new home. He felt he was in a safe place and wanted by people who cared about him. All of these feelings stopped him misbehaving, and he felt a lot happier.

Sadly, his life was suddenly turned upside down again, leaving him crushed...
After nearly seven months of living with his foster family, Liam was told the devastating news that he’d have to move to another foster home. To this day, he doesn’t know why. But move he did. And then only five weeks later he was uprooted and moved again for a third time, just nine months since his mum had died.

It was now early December, and although Liam’s third foster family did everything they could to help him settle in, he says he felt like an outsider. While you, me and most other people excitedly counted down the days to Christmas 2011, all Liam could think about was the Christmas before and decorating the tree with his mum.

Now, he didn’t feel part of this family. He felt he had to get away before he was rejected. This desperation, this agonising hurt, saw Liam first run away on Boxing Day morning and then a couple of more times in January. This was when I was put in touch with him.

Initially when we met he was very quiet and shy. But gradually, as we saw each other every Tuesday afternoon in a café, he began to open up. He told me about his mum. How he felt so lonely. That he never felt involved in the big decisions made about him. That he worried every night he’d be sent somewhere he didn’t know the next morning.

Liam met someone who helped him flourish and look forward to the future

As with all children in care, getting to the root of why Liam was running away has been vital. It’s helped him get things off his chest and for us to put together a game plan to help him identify and take control of his problems. He’s also more aware of the dangers he places himself in by running away. Plus I’ve attended meetings with Liam and those responsible for his care, where I’ve represented him and spoken about his future wishes and the support he needs.

Maybe most important of all, though, I still visit Liam every fortnight at the foster home he ran away from last Christmas. This is what so many of the 65,000 children in care in England need. They want someone they can turn to, who never gives up on them. That’s why I feel so privileged to be a part of Liam’s life. I’ve seen him flourish over the time I’ve spent with him, and now he can enjoy a safe and happy childhood.

In fact, I’ve enclosed a message from Liam about how he’s started to look forward to Christmas again. Although he knows there are many children who aren’t that fortunate yet.

Your gift this Christmas could help transform the life of a child in care

Children in care are some of the most vulnerable children in our communities. Most of them have already experienced neglect, abuse or a family crisis. That’s why your gift today is so vital.

By donating £20 today you will help more children in care like Liam receive support they so desperately need, not only at Christmas but throughout the year.

Have a lovely Christmas,

Sally Thirlaway
Project Worker
The Children’s Society

PS The Christmas season can be a painful time for many children in care. Please give a gift today to help provide life-changing support to children like Liam.