

C - Patient User Story

C lives with her two sons L, 15, and D, 10 in a terraced house just north of Rochdale. They have a dog, from a rescue home, and a cat. They've lived in this house for 9 years. It's clean and well taken care of with strawberries growing in the garden. They like the local area though L comments that there is nothing to do in Rochdale. They also say that there's quite a lot of movement on the council estate up the road (by which they seem to mean people from different countries). The boys used to share a room but they now have separate rooms. When they used to share a room D used to wake L up by slapping him in the face, so now L has his own room on the top floor – though he is too tall to stand up now. Each of the boys has an X-box in their room – C says they would fight if they had to share one.

C wanted us to speak to L about his experiences, but he was relatively quiet, giving short answers to any questions. In many ways he seemed like a stereotypical 15 year old boy. He says he likes eating, sleeping and playing a bit of football with his friends. He spends a lot of time on the weekends in Littleborough where his girlfriend lives. He was on his phone the whole time, on facebook, imessenger and snapchat. "I think people on social media know the inside of our house better than I do". He goes to a special engineering school in Oldham which he likes when it is "practical". He likes making things and doing things with his hands – after his GCSEs he wants to do an apprenticeship. C tells us he used to want to join the Army and become a mechanical engineer and fix tanks. They went to an open day at school which was about joining the army. The minute he heard the grades that you'd need he felt completely deflated. L has had problems at school. He has recently been diagnosed as dyslexic, after years of C thinking he needed an assessment. She says that he can't listen to and follow more than one instruction at a time. He used to come home and wouldn't know what his homework was so she would drive him round to other people's houses to try to find out.

Most of L's friends are from where he lives, and go to the local catholic school. C says that he tries to buy friends by buying them pizza and kebabs. He has one friend at the school he goes to but has problems with some of the other kids. Two kids jumped him in class a few months ago, and were excluded as a result. But since then C has continued to worry about him. Some of the other kids are still saying that they are going to "get him" on social media and she is worried about him. C says that the problem with school today is that there isn't enough discipline – all the kids call the teachers by their first names.

He has been going out with his girlfriend for six months and goes up to visit her in Littleborough. Her dad is a bodybuilder, and her parents are really strict. They won't let her come round unless C is there, and she isn't allowed to get on a bus by herself. L says she used to be a tomboy but definitely isn't now – though she can't wait to get full sleeve tattoos.

It quickly became clear that it was C, rather than L, who wanted to share her experiences of living with him and D. She was very concerned about her inability to discipline her children, and that other people were better at being strict with them. She said that L had become disruptive at home, and that she didn't know how to deal with him. He didn't listen to her, when she tried to ground him he would just walk out. He also had friends around all the time. One friend stayed round almost every weekend for a year until C called his dad. It got so bad that he threatened to punch in the car window. After this she couldn't cope so called social services. They told her she had done the wrong thing in calling them because they would

take him away next time and put him into care. C said that this was what she wanted – someone to take him away. She asked her dad who lives by himself in a 3 bedroom house to take L, but he said no. In the end her sister, who also has two sons aged 19 and 25, took L in for two weeks. C described her sister as much better at disciplining L than she is “Even her son said to L ‘I’d be dead if I talked to my mum like you talk to yours’”. L is back living with his mum now.

A few years ago L did speak to a counsellor, who told him that she wouldn’t talk to anyone but somehow what he told her got out. After this C felt like he lost trust in counsellors. But after her colleague gave her a leaflet for the let’s talk counselling service she asked Liam to go. At first he was reluctant, and there was a 5 month waiting list but recently he went for his assessment. C thinks that once he has got to know the woman he will open up.

L also takes part in a programme run by a local boxer who works with teenagers to help show them how to channel their anger. At first it was just about boxing but now he is getting involved in projects including collecting clothes for people.

When we arrived C warned us that she was having problems with the childminder who she had asked to take care of D that evening. Her mum would be dropping him off at the house and that “it would be chaos”. She normally takes care of him on Tuesdays and Thursday to give C a break, but she had swapped round the days this week because of our visit “Mum said people were coming round and she didn’t want me here”.

D is ten and has foetal alcohol syndrome and learning difficulties. C tells us how both D and L are adopted and “you never really know what you are going to get with adopted children”. D is a ball of energy, running after his cat Simba and throwing water balloons. He buys himself energy drinks with his pocket money which C is unhappy about. When we go for a walk down the street everyone seems to know him, and he says hello to everyone. C says that D isn’t like normal people, he tells people things are they are. He calls people “fat bastard” or “paki” which has got C into a lot of trouble. She has had people with cricket bats coming to the house and threatening her and the kids because of this.

C describes struggling to look after both the boys. Her mother and sister both live close but they won’t have both the boys to stay on the same time. C’s husband and her have split up. He was an alcoholic and became abusive. After he moved out he didn’t see the boys for a while, but after a few months L went to stay. His dad got drunk and attacked him, throttling his neck. After this L and D didn’t see him for a long time, but he is now visiting more regularly again.

C talks openly about her issues with the boys in front of them, and how difficult they are. At one point L was screwing up paper while listening to C describing how difficult he is. There was clearly tension between C and L. C says part of the problem is that she is just so stressed that she shouts at them when she should probably be calm. She says that some days by the time she has got them to go to school she is already exhausted – and then she goes to her job at the hospice. When she gets home she just wants a break but it then all

Social services have been seeing C for 3 years. She describes them as being unhelpful and “always on her back”. She felt really let down by them – and that if they had been better her marriage might not have broken down under the pressure of caring for the boys. They had a new woman come 6 months ago but she hasn’t been any better. What she really wants is a

break. She has now been offered respite support but says that she has to be back by ten and they are not flexible at all about when she can take it. They offered it to her on a Monday night – and she responded that she didn't want it because none of her friends would want to go out on a Monday.

C says that kids in Rochdale really need to an outlet, both places to go and people to talk to. She says that everything costs money – gokarting, movies etc. and that she doesn't have the money to pay for the kids to do this.