



# Loren's story

## BUILDING CONFIDENCE, TRUST AND RELATIONSHIPS

**Loren, 19 and from Sunderland, recently left children's care services. She has struggled with mental health issues throughout her life, with frequent hospital admissions and going missing becoming symptomatic of her feelings of isolation. Despite being surrounded by people, she didn't know how to reach out and ask for help.**

Loren describes herself as a shy person who hasn't always had the confidence to put across her views or to disagree with somebody else's opinion. While she was always involved in her care planning, she would often go along with things that she didn't really want, feeling as though she had very little control over her life.

When she was struggling with her mental health, Loren didn't feel confident in asking for help or sharing her feelings. She would often go missing, self-harm and she spent time in psychiatric hospitals.

Loren was offered a digital tool called Mind of My Own, which Sunderland City Council offers to all children in its care to make sure their voices are heard. Accessed via a mobile phone or computer, it gives young people the chance to write statements under several categories, and then share them with whoever they choose from their support teams.

Traditionally, support workers will write statements on behalf of young people after they have met to speak about issues or prepare for meetings. This technology has been co-produced with children and young people and is designed to more accurately capture and communicate what is important to them.

Initially, Loren turned Mind Of My Own down as she thought it was a tool to help social workers rather than her. She didn't believe anybody would read the statements or do anything about their contents.

The first time she used it, however, Loren was surprised to receive a call from her support worker to confirm he had received her statement. She started using it more often, seeing and feeling the benefits of making her voice heard.

Loren used the tool to help her prepare for review meetings, a scenario she had struggled with in the past. The process gave her more control over the meetings and eased feelings of anxiety and nervousness beforehand.

She explains: "I could fill it in a week before my meeting and know my views wouldn't be left out. It was like a weight lifted off my shoulders because I knew my social worker would get it, he would ring me to say he got it and ask if I wanted to discuss it before the meeting.

"He would print it out and bring it to the meeting. Immediately I felt empowered because he had brought it along and read it on my behalf. I could even include who I wanted to sit next to in a meeting, which doesn't seem like a big deal but for me it was."



One of the categories on Mind Of My Own is 'change something', which Loren found useful when she was worried or anxious about an issue, often late at night. She would write a statement and send it to her social worker, knowing that even though he wouldn't read it until morning, she could relax and go to sleep safe in the knowledge that it would then get sorted.

Loren's favourite part of Mind Of My Own is the 'share good news' category. She believes that meetings with social workers are usually arranged under negative circumstances, to overcome problems. This category encourages young people to contact their social workers for positive reasons as well.

"You want to share good things with them as well, the same way you would want your parents to be proud if you had achieved something."

Loren is now working as an apprentice with the participation and engagement team at Together for Children - a trust that runs children's services in Sunderland - and she would like to become a social worker. She has moved into her own tenancy and has not been admitted to hospital for a long time.

Loren also helps to train social care staff to use Mind Of My Own and she speaks to other young people in care about her experiences.

Since leaving children's care services, she has a new support worker and finds that she uses the tool less now. She can confidently speak to her support worker, to tell her how she is doing and to ask for more support when she needs it.

**MORE THAN 70 COUNCILS, LARGE ORGANISATIONS AND NATIONAL NGOS IN THE UK USE MIND OF MY OWN. THE DEVELOPERS SAY IT SAVES SOCIAL WORKERS AROUND EIGHT DAYS A YEAR TYPING UP CHILDREN'S VIEWS.**

Loren advocates the use of Mind Of My Own among young people and professionals she works with. She understands how vital it is for young people to have a voice, but also knows from experience how difficult it can be to make that voice heard.

"If I didn't have Mind Of My Own to help me build trust and relationships, and to help me work with services not against them, I wouldn't have the things I have now. I needed a tool to help me communicate and vent to people so I could receive support to deal with those things.

"Young people don't realise how powerful their voice is. If you struggle to communicate then this type of technology is the perfect tool."

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