



# Voices from the Inside

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The experiences of girls in Secure Training Centres

MARCH 2018

## Foreword

At a meeting in early 2016 to discuss the lives of some of the most vulnerable children, we learnt that a very small number of young girls under the age of 18 are held in secure residential units, serving time for criminal acts they have committed. At the time of publishing this report, 30 girls under the age of 18 are in custody – the equivalent of a full classroom at a secondary school.

We wanted to find out more. What had gone wrong with their lives that had led to them losing their liberty? Could more have been done for them before they ended up in a secure unit? What more can be done to prevent others from ending up in the same place in future?

It was important that we heard from the girls themselves. We have called this report ‘Voices from the Inside’ because it is precisely that: it tells the stories of some of the young girls who have spent time in one secure unit. It gives a voice to children who are not usually given the opportunity to tell their story and shines a light on the circumstances that led to them being locked up.

It is striking how similar the girls’ stories are. Most were born into complex and chaotic families. Many suffered significant bereavements at a young age. Almost all were under the supervision of social services. They were often brought up outside the family home or were in care. Drink, drugs and underage sex were a common part of their lives, and most had dropped out of mainstream school. Often they were not given the support needed to help them negotiate the difficult, emotional situations that they found themselves in or to make positive choices for themselves.

Nobody will be surprised to hear that most of these children had the kind of childhoods none of us would wish for our own kids. They weren't adequately protected or kept safe from harm by their parents. Indeed, from hearing their stories, it seems clear that many of their parents hadn't been kept safe as children either. One of the girls we interviewed was due to have her own child while in the secure unit, and despite everyone’s best intentions, the odds are that this cycle of generational neglect will not be broken.

One of the observations we didn't expect to take away with us was how positively the young women felt about being in the secure unit. It was obvious that compared to the chaos in their normal lives they were relieved to be in a place where their basic needs were met and where there was structure and support, where they could not drink, smoke, have access to drugs, and where they were away from what seemed to be very stressful personal relationships with their families and friendship groups. It was sad to realise that for some of the girls, the unit was the only time in their whole life that they had felt secure and cared for and not scared.

It seemed that most of the girls had received very little therapeutic support before their time in the secure unit, despite many of them having to manage the kind of traumas in their lives that would potentially derail any child, even one from the most loving and supportive environment. Many of the girls had suffered serious and sometimes multiple bereavements, for example, losing a mother and two grandparents in quick succession. The girls themselves often showed or said that they needed more help to recover from these traumas.

The girls we met have committed crimes and it is right they are being punished. Many of them were undoubtedly bright children who, had they not had to face some of the most horrendous things any child could have to deal with, you would expect to succeed in school. Whilst acknowledging they

have committed criminal behaviour, it is important to understand how they have ended up in secure units.

We want to thank the girls for speaking to us. We wish them the best on their release and hope that they can begin to turn around their lives for the better.

**Anne Longfield OBE and Dame Louise Casey**

## The interviews

At any given time, the number of young women under the age of 18 held in Secure Training Centres in this country is very small. The numbers are fluid from month to month but over the last few years there have usually been around 20 to 30 girls in the units at any one time. Girls are no longer placed in custody in Young Offender Institutes but in Secure Training Centres, along with some boys up age 17.

According to MoJ figures, 30% of girls in prison are convicted of offences classified as violence against the person, with around 20% for drug offences, similar for theft and slightly less for robbery. A very small number of girls are held for possession of weapons, arson or sexual offences.

We interviewed girls held in Rainsbrook Secure Training Centre, near Rugby.

Rainsbrook opened in 1999 and can accommodate a total of 76 boys and girls. It also houses Chadlington, a purpose built mother and baby unit to care for pregnant girls and detained young mothers and their babies. It is run by MCTnovo who have recently been awarded the contract for the centre, taking over from G4S. The latest Ofsted report into Rainsbrook conducted in December 2016 suggested that the facility required improvement.

We visited Rainsbrook 5 times over and interviewed 9 girls. The average age of the girls we interviewed was 16. The youngest was 14 and two of the girls had turned 18 while they were in Rainsbrook.

The offences they had committed are not uncommon for girls in similar institutions. Three were held for GBH or violence against a person, two for robbery, two for the supply of drugs, one for conspiracy to kidnap and two for more serious offences.

All but one of the girls we interviewed had been known to social services before they were arrested for the crime that eventually led to them being detained. The majority had been in foster care, children's homes and/or had spent time away from the family home living with a relative. The only exception to this was a foreign national who had not been brought up here and had been arrested for drug offences.

The interviews took place in an informal setting and custody staff were not present.

We asked the young women to describe: where they lived; their families; their schooling; their contact with social services; their experience of being in Rainsbrook and the impact that this had on them and their aspirations for the future.

In all cases we have taken steps to preserve the anonymity of the young women involved, and the other people affected by their cases. In the report we refer to the girls using the following names: Nia, Sara, Karen, Zoe, Anna, Lucy, Lily, Holly and Chloe.

We are grateful for the co-operation of both the management and the staff at the secure centre who helped to facilitate our time with the girls.

## Family structures

We were struck by the similarities in the girls' life experiences and backgrounds and the recurring themes that came out during the different interviews. Many of the girls had been caught in a perfect storm: a high prevalence of risky factors such as poor parental supervision and discipline, disorganisation and neglect, the availability of drugs and almost universally low income.

We set out a number of common themes raised by the girls in the hope that it shines a light on some of the reasons why they ended up in secure units before the age of 18. It was noticeable immediately that the girls were likely to be from more complex family structures than most other children grow up in. They were also more likely to be born to a young mother with a history of negative and often abusive personal relationships and problems with drink and drugs.

Many of the girls we spoke to found it hard to describe confidently all of the people in their family, how they were related to them, or to describe accurately their own place in the family. It is clear that the girls we interviewed have been exposed to a lot of different relationships. Many of these were temporary and destabilising and they were a lot for any young person to manage without proper support.

***"... on my Mum's side she's got loads of sisters and they've got loads of kids ... My sister would say like a name of someone and say or that's our cousin and I'm like what, I didn't even know..."***

***(Anna)***

Karen's family background is one example of the children that we interviewed in Rainsbrook:

### **Karen (aged 17)**

**Karen's Mum has five children from three different partners. The children range in age from 6 to 25. The oldest child is bought up by his grandmother. Her Mum is also a grandmother to her oldest son's child.**

**Karen is the only child from her Mum's relationship with her Dad. Every other weekend she stays with her Dad. Her Dad has seven children from three different relationships, including Karen. They range in age from 6 to 27. One of the older children is in prison. Karen is now pregnant with her own child.**

Karen's background is typical of many of the girls we interviewed. With a couple of exceptions, their parents no longer lived together and all had gone on to have relationships with other people (sometimes a number of different partners) who would then be in and out of the girls lives as they were growing up.

***"There are actually eight other brothers and sisters that are my Dad's but with different women..."***

***(Zoe)***

***"I've lived with my mum since I was young. I didn't know who my dad was until I was about 9 ... after I was born, four years later my mum had my sister. She was with a different man who wanted nothing to do with my sister ... And then she got into this relationship with this other man, who was my sister's dad who she then married and they were together for two years and then ... they separated."*** (Chloe)

A number of the women were born to young mothers whose own mothers had themselves been young mums too. Their brothers and sisters were often young parents.

***"[My] 19-year-old sister moved out when she was having the baby and the baby is now 2, nearly 3 ... she got put into a mother and baby unit in Liverpool and then I think she run away ... she's got her own flat now ... but she had her baby took off her, so she hasn't got her baby" (Karen)***

One of the many consequences of young motherhood and the number of children in these young girls' lives is how short a time period they are able to describe themselves as "children" - and how quickly they are catapulted into "adult" roles and responsibilities. Almost all of the girls had their childhoods, as most of us would recognise them, cut short. Alongside trauma, family breakdown, poor parenting, a lack of support, access to drink and drugs, and in some cases sexual abuse there is little wonder that to many their childhood seems a lifetime ago. Yet despite this, they themselves are of course still children. It's just they are children having to cope with significant life challenges which even many adults would find daunting or overwhelming.

An obvious manifestation of this is their role in looking after the younger children in the family:

***"... everything was fine but I started to take a lot of responsibility for the baby, was infatuated with him, he was my baby, my little boy, my little brother, I was doing everything for him ..." (Zoe)***

A number of the girls described how they were brought up in part or exclusively by their grandparents. While many of the girls speak positively about this experience, it was often accompanied by a sense of loss and abandonment at not being brought up by their Mum or their Dad. This sense of abandonment or of losing their parents at a young age is a common theme, and one that clearly had a significant impact on their lives.

***"And they split up me Mum and Dad did. So me Mum moved to Manchester ... and I hardly seen her... and me Dad never used to come and see us in the Centre... I remember going to the Centre once and none of them turned up ... we were all upset but we're used to like being neglected and that." (Anna)***

***"I have lived with my Nan since I was a few days old. My Mum and Dad are in and out of prison. I am not close with my Mum. My Nan is my Dad's Mum. I thought that my Nan was my Mum until my parents told me when I was 6 or 7. It was a real shock. I didn't want to believe it." (Lucy)***

***"Well I used to live with me Grandma and me Grandad because of my behaviour. I use to live with my Mum first when I was younger and then I was always with my Grandma. She was like me Mum." (Lily)***

***"The agreement was my Mum's Mum, that's the Nan that I live with now, was going to take me, and my Dad's Mum was going to take my sister ... you know how families are and they was older, they couldn't bear taking both of us and so we got split up very young." (Holly)***

***"There was us three girls and there was me two cousins as well (living with paternal grandparents) cos they got took off their Mum and Dad too." (Anna)***

There was often a history across the generations of having children removed from parents or being brought up by another relative. Many were known to social services from a young age. This upbringing was frequently described in a way that suggested this was seen as normal or

commonplace amongst families. There was evidence too of cross-generational harm. For some girls, history was simply repeating itself – their own parents had themselves been removed from their grandparents when they were children and now they had had their children removed from them. Similar problems cascade from one generation to the next.

***“But me Dad’s brother ... he got adopted. Me Nan gave him up, cos she had him at a young age, she gave him up for adoption and her Mum and Dad took him in.” (Anna)***

***“Well I was living with me Mum and Dad first and then like I got took off them by social services when I was really young. I’d say about 4, 5, something like that, and then I got put with my other Nan and Grandad.” (Anna)***

***“My Mum was adopted when she was 6 months old ... they found that she had 1<sup>st</sup> degree burns over her whole body and a fractured skull, and then my Mum also met her real Mum a few years later and her real Mum also had 7 kids which she had kept.” (Zoe)***

***“... Not been there as a Dad. I see him more as a cousin. Same with my Mum, but even less.” (Lucy)***

***“... my Mum treated me like I was broken from like the age of 12 ... I was never really happy, so, like I had a lot going on through my life, yeah before any of that (criminal behaviour) happened.” (Sara)***

It is also clear from the interviews that the girls were exposed to poor parenting, often from birth, and brought up in an environment that was neither safe nor loving, which lacked role models and where worklessness, or at best insecure low paid work, was typical. As a result of this poor parenting, almost all of the girls lacked the security we all need as children. And as well as not being taken care of properly, many of the girls had been taught few of the boundaries children need to learn at a young age. Again this was often an inter-generational problem.

***“She (my Mum) is very lazy, so is my stepdad. They are lazy people ... he’ll go to the job centre and then come home and he’ll drink and then he’ll drink and then he’ll wake up and there’ll be like just cans all around him ... he worked at B&Q, he worked at (removed) which was probably one of the best jobs he’d ever had but he lost it. He fell asleep on one of the machines and then he used to do building work and stuff like that when I was younger and mechanics ... he is just lazy. He is not motivated.” (Sara)***

Listening to the girls, it was clear that there was often a high prevalence of drug taking and/or alcohol abuse taking place within the family. Sometimes this was the root cause of family breakdown, and frequently it would be the trigger for social services to step in.

***“... because of drink and drugs that me Mum and Dad were taking ... we were looked after kids ...” (Anna)***

***“Like when my Mum would overdose and then I’d have to deal with it from like the age of 6, like picking her up off the bathroom floor, having to call ambulances, bullied quite a lot at school because of wetting the bed, always smelt like wee, was going to school smelling so was bullied by the other kids. Was never really in a clean house, was constantly running from the police and social service and moving around a lot ...” (Zoe)***

***“She got with my dad when she was 16, she started taking heroin when she was 18. My sister was born addicted to heroin. I don’t think I was. But I didn’t grow up with my Mum, I remember being with her when I was little, she used to take us out shoplifting and things ...” (Holly)***

***“My sister remembers this clearly, I don’t, but this happened twice, my Nan told me ... I was thirsty. I was only two at the time and my sister picked up the bottle (of methadone) and gave me some. I was in hospital, losing my skin and that.” (Holly)***

Some of the girls had also grown up around violence.

***“When we moved in with him (her mother’s boyfriend), it was nasty – I mean a horrible relationship my mum had with him. My Mum was pregnant - he locked her in a cupboard - just fed her bread and milk ...” (Karen)***

***“She used to be with her boyfriend, they used to fight ... then they was arguing but I was young, so I didn’t know what they was arguing about, and he hit her, and I was really young, I was about year 1 and I started hitting him. I started proper beating him and beating him ... I was like “Did you see me Mum” and she was like “good on you”. But you could tell she was crying and then I never saw her for like, ages.” (Holly)***

***“I remember one night, I was in my bed asleep and I heard shouting and that. Walked into the kitchen and he had a knife against my mum’s throat ... I was about 8. He was vile – he was very controlling. The amount of time we had to leave the house for the day because he was kicking off and like mum had no money – nothing on her. We just had to go and drive round all day ...” (Chloe)***

Most of the girls had been known to social services or in the care system before committing the offence which led to being sent to the secure unit. Many had been moved around to live in multiple locations and with different carers, with varying levels of support.

Zoe was removed from her mother’s care because her mother was a heroin user and was neglecting her. She was placed in the care of her father, who she hardly knew. She returned to her mother after committing criminal damage, following confirmation that her mother was now off heroin.

***“All I have wanted from my 13<sup>th</sup> birthday was to turn 16 because I knew that once I turned 16 I’d get my own place and I’d be more in control of what I wanted to do ... I couldn’t just settle in one place, so if social services wouldn’t move me, I’d misbehave so they would have to ... so that’s where all the criminal damage has come from – not wanting to be places and then having to either criminalise myself or hurt myself to get away from a situation that I didn’t want to be in” (Zoe)***

***“My Mum kicked me out of home and then my Nan kicked me out and I lived on the street. And then I went from living on the street to getting in foster care and I went from foster care to living with my Auntie.” (Sara)***

## **School Life**

It is interesting how insignificant a part schooling and teachers played in the girls’ lives. A number of the girls were excluded from mainstream education before they were sentenced. While at the STC they cannot attend a mainstream school and attend a pupil referral unit. One child said her school



attendance before she was sent to the unit was based on whether her Mum needed to do something and needed somewhere for her daughter to go to while she was away.

***“In year 8 I stopped going to school ... They tried giving me a timetable with different hours. I didn’t like it. I just wanted to be doing my own thing.” (Lucy)***

Some of the children moved from school to school frequently. Sometimes this was to live with a different family member, sometimes they were moved by social services changing their care arrangements. Chloe described how by the age of 12 she had attended three different primary schools and three different secondary schools, due both to moving schools because of bullying and living at times with her Mum and at other times with her Dad.

***“I moved Primary School because we got a bigger house and the second Primary School I went to was down the road, that was where all my siblings go. I went to one high school and then went to go and live with my Dad for a while, then I moved high schools again and moved back in with my Mum.” (Karen)***

## **Bereavement**

One of the most striking themes was the number of girls who had been bereaved, often repeatedly. Sometimes this was a loss of the people they were closest to - a parent and/or a grandparent. Zoe described how she was told of the death of her mother and how she reacted:

***“... and the woman said ‘your Mum was found dead this morning’... They told me that T (younger brother) had been with her body for a number of days. So he was found by someone, it could have been 1 or 2 days ... I think I cried for 1 or 2 seconds.... There’s times I broke down. I’d drop a pen and cry but I think it’s very much a defence mechanism. I’m shutting it out. In myself, I do now feel I went out of my way to shut things out. Maybe it’s a subliminal thing, a protection thing. I don’t know but I didn’t deal with it. I just shut it out” (Zoe)***

***“Yeah I got put there (maternal grandparents) ... I was there for a couple of years and me Nan died ... Then I got put with me other Nan and Grandad on my Dad’s side. Then found out that me Grandad died on me Mum’s side – so both of them passed away. There was 5 kids altogether that got put with me Dad’s Mum and Dad which is me Nan and Grandad. I’ve been there since I was 8,10 something like that and then me Grandad died there ... then we found out that me Mum died as well. So she passed and then I turned to drink and drugs and all of that and then everything went stupid.” (Anna)***

There was also evidence of trauma caused by unexpected bereavement. One girl had witnessed a murder. Another had seen two friends die in an accident.

## **Abuse**

Some of the girls told us they had been subjected to sexual and other abuse.

***“I mean the love that I was told I was given when I was 8 years old was not love. That was definitely not love. When I got to the age of 16 I was showering four times a day. Sometimes I’ll go back to the unit I’ll shower three times” (Sara)***

***“...the last incident that I had at home before I came here, I full on smashed up my room, glass everywhere, smashed up my room, mirrors, broke my TV, bit my neighbour because she tried to help my Mum, she was just getting in the way so I bit her... told my Mum I hated her, but everything calmed down that night, that is when I just opened up and told my Mum the truth... but it took me all those years to tell, for me to be in college and say that. It was a bit embarrassing but...” (Karen)***

***“My Dad lost his job, he was an alcoholic ... I was dropping hints that I didn’t want to go ... I kept going at weekends, it was getting worse and worse, my step Mum was going out because she didn’t want to deal with him. That went on for about two years and in that two years, he was sexually abusive.” (Chloe, describing being sexually abused by her father at the age of 14).***

***“We were just hanging around, messing about and then I was drinking J20, yeah and the next thing I remember is that I wake up ... in a little alley way. I wake up there, with no trousers on, just my t-shirt and covered in blood ... I was sexually assaulted ... I was drugged ... I stopped going school and then I ran away... and then there were pictures all online – pictures on the internet of what happened ...” (Sara describes attending a party aged 15)***

## **Relationships**

Most of the girls had had underage sex with older men - often while they were under the care and supervision of social services.

While they were aware that these relationships could be described as abusive, they went to great lengths to tell us that they were not. Nia’s ex-boyfriend was a lot older than her:

***“He was 24 at the time. He’s in his 30s now ... I was 13 when I met him ... I still talk to him now but on and off. Last year or the year before, like it started getting bad. Like he started beating me up and making me do stuff.” (Nia)***

Nia also told us that he wanted her to have sex with his friends, including men she did not know:

***“Sometimes yeah. He never forced me, but he’d just beat me up and punch me in the face and that ... Sometimes obviously I’d go and meet them ... but otherwise me and this other girl ... used to go... like random places like random men’s houses.” (Nia)***

Lucy used to stay out at night aged 14 or leave home in the early hours of the morning. Zoe was 13 when she lost her virginity to a 17-year-old boy. She “felt like I was a big girl and I was ready to do anything that I wanted to do.” Chloe had a boyfriend who she thought was 24 but turned out to be 31 and who had three girlfriends under the age of 18:

***“We were together for about 9 months and he drove a wedge between me and my Mum. I moved in with him ... I dropped out of school, didn’t do GCSEs ... he got another person pregnant when she was 13 ...” (Chloe)***

***“I was young. It weren’t “missing”. I like was staying out after the time I had agreed, like 12, and obviously they’d still report me missing because I was young.” (Nia)***

***“I used to run away all the time ... stay on the streets with all my friends and just stay up all night and go to a friend’s house.” (Lily)***

## **Drugs and alcohol**

Drug abuse and alcohol abuse were raised repeatedly during the interviews. A common theme among the girls was a positive reaction to not having access to drink and drugs in the secure unit.

***“First time I tried drink was round my friend’s house but when I started proper drinking. Even before I came here I was drinking like two bottle of stuff a day, stuff like (Premium Vodka) ... I wouldn’t say alcoholic but I do drink a lot... I realise a lot of things it’s just an easier option, I always go for it...” (Nia)***

***“I started smoking cannabis. I started eating like hash brownies. We made weed tea in school and I started drinking again ...” (Sara)***

***“I was drinking vodka every day ... sniffing coke every day ... weed...” (Anna)***

***“Sometimes it’s difficult innit, so used to having it, when I feel happy or sad or anything like I’ll just drink. Being here it’s like a bit difficult” (Nia on not having access to alcohol in Rainsbrook)***

***“Do you know what, I feel so much better in me self you know, without no drink or drugs or anything – it’s so good.” (Anna)***

***“It feels different because I know I shouldn’t be here but I think it’s just karma. Karma coming back to us, this is what I need ... All this is karma, yeah, this year. Like if I was still out, I’d be doing what I’m doing. Taking the drugs that I used to take, drinking, smoking. I used to take amphetamine all the time ... cannabis ...” (Lily)***

***“This is like rehab to me.” (Holly)***

## **Support**

A number of the girls described having been offered psychiatric and other support in the past. In most cases they had chosen not to take this up. One child said she didn’t think a ‘talking session with somebody once a week is going to help them understand me or where I’m coming from. I think it’s a waste of time opening up to people.’ Another was offered support to work through the trauma she had experienced with the death of her mother, but refused. However, others were more positive about the support they received.

***“I used to go to Young Minds, because of my behaviour. I decided to go and I spoke my mind about it ... because my Mum couldn’t cope, I was vile, I used to be vile and the behaviour and things like that – cos I used to get bullied, so I used to open up and then lash out at everyone. I used to take it out on everyone else.” (Karen)***

***“I used to be very unemotional growing up – I used to not have any emotions at all. I used to be really cold... like when I first come in here, I cried and cried for 3 hours and it’s the first time I’d cried in like two years ...” (Sara)***

It was obvious from interviews that on the whole the girls had not had many trustworthy and positive adult role models in their lives and that they all appreciated in Rainsbrook being around people who they recognised as having their best interests at heart and who treated them fairly. One of the things that really stood out was how much the girls themselves gained from the regime in the secure unit - the sense of safety and being able to step away from managing the complex relationships that made up their lives. One girl described the unit as a “a break from everybody ... a break from everyone on the outside. The idiots I used to know. Certain family members.” Another spoke of her regret at being in the unit, but admitted it was what she needed at the time because it moved her out of the social services system. She also saw Rainsbrook as a ‘break’ from the pressures of her life on the outside.

***“This is the most stable I have ever been because I know that I am staying here, I know how long that I am staying here, I know that I am getting fed, I know I’ve got a shower. I know that I have got a bed yes, so there’s no questioning anything. Like when I first came in, I was weeing the bed, I was not eating. I was scared” (Sara)***

***“I’m nervous about leaving. When I left last time I cried. I used to get ... I just got away with things. I don’t really like change and then when I was here I started getting used to it. And you have nothing to worry about here. Someone else looks after your life. It’s not stressful.” (Lucy)***

A number of the girls described the need for order and control in their lives.

***“I reckon I could live in my own place and it’ll be fine. When I go into my own room it’s kind of like having my own place. Like everything is neat. My sheets are ironed. My clothes are ironed and put away. My underwear is ironed and put away ... my books are in alphabetical order ... my socks are colour coded ...” (Sara)***

However, there was very little sense that on leaving Rainsbrook there were plans in place that would set the girls on a different path and take them away from the lives they had previously lived. We saw little evidence that the education they were doing was very taxing or that it would prepare them for life on the outside. All of the girls were likely to leave Rainsbrook early for good behaviour. Karen was expecting to serve just 7 months of an 18 month sentence.

***“(I was doing) Travel and Tourism ... they said to me there’s no point staying on that course really because you can’t get a job with the conviction I’ve got now, so I’ll have to do something else when I get out.” (Anna)***

Karen, who is 16 and pregnant with her own child, described what she hopes will happen when she leaves Rainsbrook.

***“When I get into a routine with the baby I’ll get my own place.... Baby is gonna help me... she is going to let me grow up and be an actual adult and more independent with her ...” (Karen)***

## Conclusion

The purpose of these accounts is not to put forward a list of recommendations, but to shine a light on the life experiences of these girls and to give them an opportunity to tell their stories.

Hearing these stories first-hand, we were struck by the similarity of many of their lives.

- Most of the girls came from complex and disrupted families. Many of them found it hard to actually describe all of the people in their family, or how they were related to them.
- Most had been exposed to a variety of different relationships, many of them temporary or destabilising. Often their mothers and fathers had come from families that were equally confusing and complex.
- In almost all cases the parents did not live together and all had gone on to have new relationships with people who would often be in and out of the girls lives as they were growing up.
- A number of the girls were brought up by grandparents and felt a real sense of loss and abandonment about not being with their Mums and Dads.
- Many were moved around a lot in a short period of time, which impacted on their education and stability. Most were known to social services from a young age.
- Frequently, the girls no longer actually saw themselves as children. Most had been forced into adult roles and responsibilities from a very early age. Many had suffered multiple bereavements.
- Few of them had been taught the boundaries children need to learn as they are growing up.
- Drugs and drink were recurring problems – both with abuse taking place within the family and underage drinking and illegal drugs a normal part of some of these girls' lives.
- Underage sexual relationships, sometimes with men significantly older than themselves, were common.
- Anxiety, learning difficulties and self-harm were also a part of many of the girls' lives, which were visible to professionals long before they ended up in Rainsbrook.

It is clear that most of the girls saw Rainsbrook as beneficial. It would be wrong to say they were happy to be there, but they were certainly relieved that being in the unit provided them with a safe and secure environment where they could escape many of the pressures they were under in the outside world. Some saw the unit as a 'time out' or likened it to rehab.

The tragedy was that for many of them, Rainsbrook was the first time in their lives that they actually felt safe.



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