

Bio: Ian Thomas- Social Work Student / Public speaker / Trainer

Ian is a former looked after child, he lived with 20 families and several children's homes. Ian left care at age seventeen and quickly entered into the criminal justice system shortly after. Which resulted in a total of; 35 arrests, seven convictions, consequently being accommodated in ten prisons over three years of incarceration.

Parallel to Ian's care and criminal justice experience Ian suffered with addiction. Ian's addiction took him to moments of desperation as he suffered with a high crack cocaine and heroin dependency living street homeless. After five rehabilitation centres Ian was finally able to achieve abstinence based recovery.

Ian now works within fostering, addiction and youth offending sector utilising his experience and insight personally and professionally to improve the quality of care children and young people receive. Ian is passionate about direct work with children and the support/training of foster carers. Ian has delivered national training to fostering families that support their development and understanding of the internal and external factors effecting children and young people growing up in care. Ian wrote and delivered a national strategy to engage children and young people for one of the leading children's services. This enabled a service that informs, improves and promotes child centered practice. Ian is also a third year Social Work Birmingham City University student. Ian has supported The Oxford Rees Centre with blogs that have been published.

Ian has spoken at both national and international conferences, such as International Foster Care Organisation (IFCO) - Japan, England and Canada. The Labour Party conference- Brighton 2015 'Why children in care over represented in the criminal justice system. Beyond Youth Custody (BYC) - talking on research that focuses on custodial release for young people at West Minster. Ian worked with government policy writers in Russia- Supporting links between children who are in conflict with the law and their human rights, and the development of children and young people's engagement and participation in Finland- Key Assets.

The topics Ian covered were child care and the looked after sector, and youth/adult offending and the links between childhood trauma and addiction. Ian has also appeared live on the BBC Victoria Derbyshire multiple times speaking about how the children in care are over represented in the criminal justice system and on the topic of Social Work. More recently Ian delivered a TED talk on the 'Gift of desperation'.

'The gift of desperation' TED x - <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4ian6CTqj6w>

'Why are foster carers important?'- The Oxford Rees Centre for Research in Fostering and Education- <http://reescentre.education.ox.ac.uk/about-us/why-are-foster-carers-important-young-peoples-views-2/>

The Victoria Derbyshire show- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5H7YncgiCD4>