**What’s love got to do with it? Workshop Blog by Polly Carr**

‘What’s love got to do with it? Young People’s perspectives’ – this was the title of the workshop held by Rachael Vaughan at the ExChange and CASCADE ‘All you need is love’ conference 2019. The workshop focused on ways that young people in the care system can have their voices heard and we heard some of their opinions on how they are – or are not – listened to and appreciated.

Rachael stared by showing us posters made by some of the young people that she works with, they displayed messages such as ‘If we are not shown love, we do not know love’ and ‘Say it loud – your voice matters’ – both powerful messages especially coming from children of such a young age. The message that I took from these posters and from the workshop as a whole, is that having someone that listens makes all the difference to young people in care – having someone who works with them rather than just working for them.

Working in small groups we were given two different scenarios – one depicting a young person who is moved from home to home on a regular basis and the other a young person who had lost contact with all their siblings, except one. After speaking to both the young people in the room and professionals who work in and around social care, we discussed as a group the ways in which love, relationships and better support systems would benefit the young people in these scenarios and we agreed that more open communication with young people, and having a trusted adult to rely on, would be wholly beneficial.

We then went on to discuss the barriers that young people in the care system face, and ideas on how we can do better to make their experiences more positive and their lives happier. The young people in the room spoke about feeling like a “case” to some social workers and that this misguided professionalism made them feel less comfortable than they should towards their care professionals. Having spoken to the young people and heard their perspectives, it became clear that for them the most important area for improvement was communication – if they felt involved in the conversations and the decisions being made they would feel more safe and comfortable in their environment.

The main takeaway from this session was that we need to focus on the little things when it comes to young people, they had put together a card with eight specific areas they found were important to pay attention to:

* Be there.
* Don’t cancel on us.
* Appreciate us.
* Celebrate our achievements.
* Accept us for who we are.
* Make time for us.
* Listen.
* Involve us in decisions.

Doing these little things every day, make all the difference to a young person in care – and that is most important.