

Chantelle's story

Being a mother is not the easiest thing in the world, but wanting to be a mother is the most natural. If you have a learning disability being allowed to be a mother can be extremely difficult. This is Chantelle's story.

My name is Chantelle, I would describe myself as a 24 year old woman with 3 children. Others may describe me as somebody with a learning disability who is not capable of looking after her children.

Foster care

When my eldest daughter was 6 days old she was taken into foster care, 4 months later I was pregnant with my second daughter, she was taken into care straight from the hospital, as social services had concerns about the care they were having when I was living with my mother and her partner.

When this was all going on I felt I was on my own with nobody to support me, explain what was happening or listen to me.

When the girls were in foster care I found out I was pregnant again, I didn't want social services to know as I was scared they would take this child from me as well, I tried to hide it as long as I could, but people started to notice when I went to supervised contact visits to see my girls.

Looking for help

When I was 6 months pregnant I went to the Person to Person



office to see if they could help me as they had helped me in the past with a citizens advocate, Jackie put me in touch with Carol who is a parent advocate and we began working together. Not long after we got together I became homeless. The first thing

Carol did was help me to get a social worker, and find somewhere to live. I agreed to move into supported living with a couple, but was clear that when the baby was born I wanted to live independently with my child. I knew that I may need a little

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support to start with and I was fine with that.

Carole

When we first met Carol seemed ok but I wasn't sure how much I could tell her as I was scared she would share it with social services. We met loads of times, drank loads of hot chocolates and talked about anything. I gradually started to trust her and felt I could open up and be honest. Carol explained about her work and asked what I wanted, I told her all I wanted was a chance to be a mother. I don't feel I was given this with my girls, sometimes I feel bad and think I didn't try hard enough, and I don't want this to be the same with Christopher.

She's never judged me or told me what I should or shouldn't do but has just been clear as to what is happening, making sure I understand, letting me know what options are available and then given me the choice and supporting me to make my own decisions – rightly or wrongly. Sometimes there have been things that she hasn't been able to help me with, but then she'd put me in touch with somebody who could or get them to speak to me.

Before, with the girls when I went to meetings I would be nervous, and too scared to say anything, I often didn't understand the long words or what things meant. People sometimes find it hard to understand what I'm saying, so half the time I wouldn't bother speaking because they didn't listen to me anyway.

Learning

Now when we go to meetings I meet with Carol before and we go through all the reports and minutes so I understand, and I make sure I get all the questions ready that I want to ask. I still get nervous and anxious when I have to go to all the meetings with social services, my solicitor and to court, but having support with me makes me feel more in control and at least I know what's happening now.



services had when my girls went into care, and tried to find courses that I could go on that would help me learn. I completed a nurturing programme with Flying Start (I missed 1 week because I went into labour) but I was back the next week to finish the course.

I also had a virtual baby overnight and for a weekend. I even shocked myself but felt so proud when both simulation reports came back saying I had achieved 100%. It

was so good to take the reports to a Core Group Meeting where people were trying to tell me I'm not capable of looking after a baby.

When I was pregnant with Christopher I put my birth plan together before we went to the meeting, I thought about who I wanted with me and what type of labour I wanted. I knew that Christopher would be taken into foster care when I was in hospital but I was able to ask that I be given a couple of days with him first so that we could bond. This all made me feel that I had some control as to what was happening to me and my child.

Court

My solicitor tried to get me into a mother and baby unit to be assessed, but the courts would not agree to this after reading through all the assessment reports about me and my partner.

I'm still going through the courts at the moment but the recommendations are that Christopher goes for adoption. I will be heartbroken if this happens and I am going to fight for him until the end. I still haven't been given the chance to be a mother but at least I know that this time I have tried everything I could to keep my son.

I want to tell my story so other people know what it feels like to have their kids taken from them, I'm not going to be there for his first tooth, first step and first day in school. All I've got to look forward to is a letter a year until my children are 18 and then hope that they'll ask to see me.