

Hello ladies, gentlemen, brothers and sisters. Today I am going to talk about why peer to peer interactions and participation are so important for making positive changes and how I built my whole career and life around these interactions.

My name is Carrie, I am 30 years old, married, own my own home, have a beautiful 8 month old son Joshua and I grew up in foster care in England due to my mother's drug addiction.

I came across my first peer to peer support interaction when I was in college. I attended a care leaver "Study Sunday" group, where we would make Sunday dinner together and catch up on school or college work. I quickly became a supporting peer within the group, as I did well academically. I found helping others a really positive experience. It was not until I was at university that I was involved in official peer to peer support. My university worked with other universities to become one of the first in England to run "summer schools" for local children in care. I was a care leaver ambassador at these events, supporting the young people attending and sharing my experiences. The events usually ran over a few days and had different "taster" sessions at the university's to show that university was fun and also achievable for someone with care experience.

For example a "forensic day" where we took the dna out of a banana and used dna mapping to "solve a crime".

This peer to peer support helped me when I was struggling myself, by helping and inspiring others, I saw in myself what they saw in me - a positive role model.

These events now happen all over England with most universities carrying them out!

When I graduated, I got a job at a university as a dedicated Care Leaver Officer, my job was to create and embed work to help more care leavers come to university. This involved recruiting and training care leaver ambassadors to do the role I did when I was in university.

After a year I started working at the Care Leavers Association.

Here I have been running a project around independent living, designed and ran by care leaver peers (but I will tell you more about that this afternoon)

The CLA is a user led organisation, ran by care leavers for care leavers. Peer to

Peer interaction is key to the work that we do, everything we do is designed with care leavers for care leavers.

I also sit on the board of directors for the International Foster Care Organisation, where our best peer to peer training happens at our conferences, where we work with care leavers from around the world to share our experiences and learn about how to be advocates for our younger care brothers and sisters.

Each professional step has meant I can do more and have more of a positive impact for my care leaver brothers and sisters.

It has improved my personal life tremendously, by providing a global family that understands the feelings and issues that you face when you have care experience. By helping others, I have helped myself deal with my own life in a better way. I feel no shame about my experiences, I and those with care experience have done nothing wrong, we were just in bad situations.

I hope you are all as excited as I am to learn about the positive changes we can make in Italy with this amazing care leaver family!