

Children and young people's experiences of moving through services after they have experienced abuse or harm

The three composite case studies in this resource are drawn from interviews carried out in 2025 by a researcher from University of Edinburgh with 6 children and young people who experienced abuse or harm in Edinburgh, East Lothian and Midlothian.

All identifying features have been changed for anonymity, but all of the situations illustrated in the case studies are represented in the interviews. These interviews were the first phase of a formative evaluation of Sycamore Bairns' Hoose. Sycamore Bairns' Hoose is a new approach to multi-agency services for children and young people after abuse or harm has been identified operating across the three local authorities. These composite case studies have been developed as a reflective resource to place children and young people's experiences at the heart of efforts to further improve services after abuse or maltreatment. The full report [Joining the Dots](#) provides a rich snapshot of children, young people and professionals' experiences between February and June 2025, with the purpose of stimulating reflection and discussion to aid the ongoing development of Sycamore Bairns' Hoose.

Each case study has the visual story on one side and a text version of the character's story on the reverse. They are presented here as a tool for reflection about children's experiences.

You might want to think about the following questions as you consider the case studies:

- What do you think are the child's strengths?
- What are the child's current needs and how might they be met?
- What works well for the child? What needs to change?
- How could professionals work better together to meet children and young people's needs?
- Does the child or young person, and those supporting for them, have all the information they need?
- Are there places in their journey where the child or young person could have more control or choice?
- What systems need to be in place to support professionals to meet children and young people's needs?
- Do the experiences represented in these case studies meet the Bairns' Hoose standards (see link below)?

For more information about Scottish Government's roll-out of the Bairns' Hoose model:

<https://www.bairnshoosescotland.com/about-bairns-hoose/establishing-bairns-hoose-in-scotland/>

For more information about University of Edinburgh's Bairns' Hoose evaluation programme:

[Bairns' Hoose \(Barnahus\) Evaluation - Scotland | School of Social and Political Science](#)

For information about the National Bairns' Hoose Standards:

[Child Friendly Bairns' Hoose Standards](#)

[National Bairns' Hoose Standards](#)

Date: 12 August 2025



THE UNIVERSITY
of EDINBURGH

Child Safety, Justice and Recovery
RESEARCH GROUP



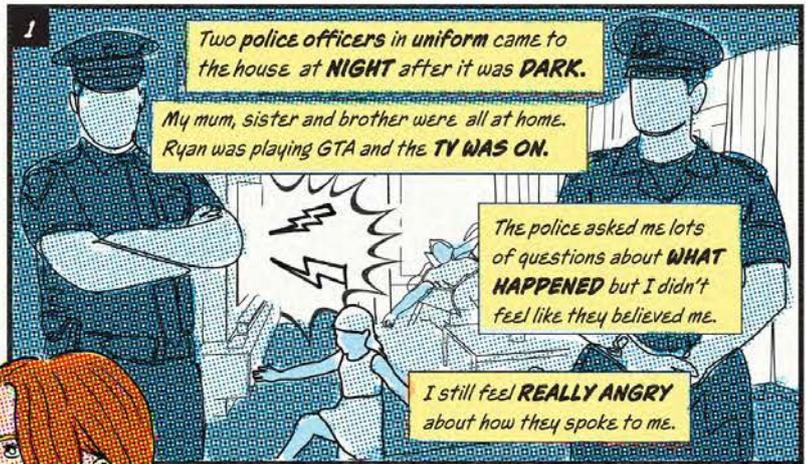
NHS
Lothian



DOROTA'S STORY

My name is Dorota and I'm 15. I live in a house in a small town in East Lothian with my Mum, Agnieszka she's an office manager, and my Dad - who's called Craig, and he's a cleaner. I'm the oldest child in my family and I've got a younger sister Ana - she's 7, and a younger brother Ryan who is 12. I go to my local secondary school where I'm coming towards the end of S4. In my spare time I play football and play for the local football team and I'm really into music.

About a year ago I told my friend about something horrible that had happened to me at a party a few weeks before. I'd been raped by someone I thought was a friend - he's an S5 boy and he goes to the same school as me. My pal told me she really thought I needed to tell another adult about what had happened and in the end I managed to tell my mum a bit about it which was really embarrassing and stressful but then she phoned the police.



Two police officers in uniform came to the house at NIGHT after it was DARK.

My mum, sister and brother were all at home. Ryan was playing GTA and the TV WAS ON.

The police asked me lots of questions about WHAT HAPPENED but I didn't feel like they believed me.

I still feel REALLY ANGRY about how they spoke to me.

A few days later my mum got a phone call inviting me to come to an interview at the SYCAMORE CENTRE.



They emailed us a video link to watch which explained where we would go and what would happen and stuff.

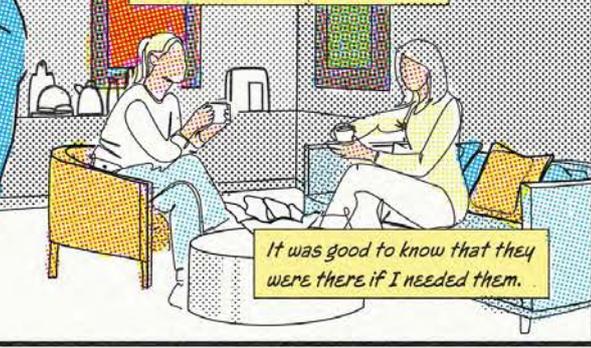
THE INTERVIEW was long and hard but I think it was as good as it could have been...



I was worried about who would get to hear the recording of the interview, but they reassured me.

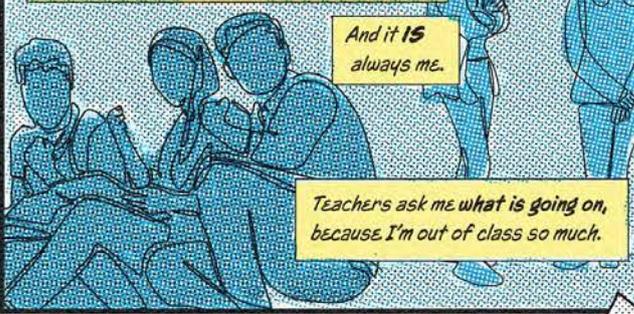
I sat on a huge sofa and the woman was on a little chair. There were lots of paintings and colour.

My mum and her friend sat in the kitchen area and drank tea.



It was good to know that they were there if I needed them.

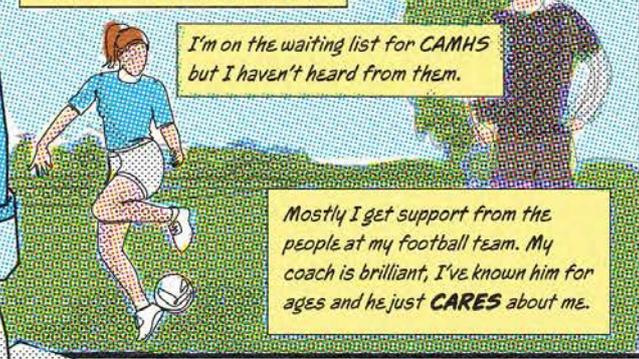
I'm finding SCHOOL REALLY DIFFICULT to be honest. Every time the teacher gets a call I'm like, 'Oh, no, it's going to be me.'



And it IS always me.

Teachers ask me what is going on, because I'm out of class so much.

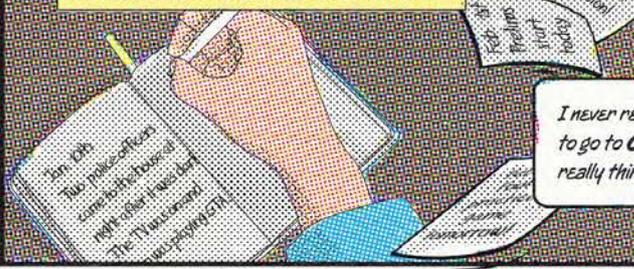
I went to see a support worker. She was nice, but we didn't vibe.



I'm on the waiting list for CAMHS but I haven't heard from them.

Mostly I get support from the people at my football team. My coach is brilliant, I've known him for ages and he just CARES about me.

It's STILL a waiting thing with the police.



I never really expected it to go to COURT or didn't really think about that.

I just thought about getting it over and done with but then now that I'm thinking about it, it's a WHOLE YEAR since it actually happened to me, so it's trying to remember everything that happened from a year ago and trying to put it into words again.

My name is Dorota and I'm 15. I live in a house in a small town in East Lothian with my Mum, Agnieska she's an office manager, and my Dad - whose called Craig, and he's a cleaner. I'm the oldest child in my family and I've got a younger sister Ana - she's 7, and a younger brother Ryan who is 12.

I go to my local secondary school where I'm coming towards the end of S4. In my spare time I play football and play for the local football team and I'm really into music.

About a year ago I told my friend about something horrible that had happened to me at a party a few weeks before. I'd been raped by someone I thought was a friend - he's an S5 boy and he goes to the same school as me. My pal told me she really thought I needed to tell another adult about what had happened and in the end I managed to tell my mum a bit about it which was really embarrassing and stressful but then she phoned the police.

After my mum's phone-call, two police came to the house really late at night. They asked me lots of questions about what happened and wrote some of it down. I don't remember everything but I know Ryan and Ana and mum were all around and it was really noisy and difficult. I remember feeling patronised by the way they asked me questions and I didn't feel like they believed me. I still feel really angry about how they spoke to me.

A few days later my mum got a phone call inviting me to come to an interview at the Sycamore Centre. They emailed us a video link to watch which explained what would happen at the interview - that felt helpful to know a bit about the interview and what the place was like.

My mum and her friend took me to the recorded interview. It was long and hard but I think it was as good as I think it could have been. I was allowed to take breaks whenever I needed and there were things like fidget toys and it was a comfortable place to sit. The interviewers were really kind and I didn't feel like they were judging me but it was nerve-wracking. My mum and her friend sat in the kitchen area and I knew that they were okay and had stuff to make tea with and lots of snacks. When I left there, I felt okay but I didn't know much about what would happen next.

I'm finding school really difficult to be honest. I keep getting called out of class to go and speak to different people and all the other people in my class are always asking me what happened but I don't want to tell them. I feel like my school didn't really know how to handle it when people started gossiping on social media about it. But I do get to Miss MacMillan every couple of weeks to talk about stuff and she is really nice.

I went back to the same place that I did my interview to see a woman who mum said might be able to help me. She was nice enough but I didn't really vibe with her. So someone said they would put me on the waiting list for CAMHS, that was ages ago and I haven't heard from them.

Mostly I get support from the people at my football team. My coach is brilliant, I've known him for ages and he just cares about me. We don't talk about what happened, but I know he knows. I go to a youth group too, I'm not sure if they know but they look out for me and we have fun, so I sometimes forget what happened.

I know the police have been investigating my rape but it has been over a year now and I haven't heard anything for months. I don't even know if he is going to get charged or what he'll be charged with. If it does go to court I don't know if I'll have to give evidence. I think they said they might be able to use the interview that I recorded for evidence but I might still have to go - I'm not sure. It's been ages, I'm not sure I can even remember everything exactly. And if I do go will I have to see him? I'm not sure I could do that.

EVE'S STORY

My name is Eve and I'm 12. I have a pet rabbit called Percy who I really love - I want to get a dog but mum says we can't just now. I like drawing anime cartoons and spending time with my friends. I live in Edinburgh. I used to live in Leith but now we live in Wester Hailes - we had to move house because of dad.

When I lived in my old house I used to go to my friend's house to get away from my dad because he was always angry and he used to hit mum. Then there was one time where he really hurt her and he hit me too. It was really scary. We went to stay at my gran's that night and I haven't seen my dad since. It's been really horrible.

I remember the police coming to gran's.

We were all very upset.

Mum was crying and gran was **REALLY** angry at dad.

The police made mum cry **EVEN MORE** cos they kept asking questions about why she'd stayed with dad so long.

I think she **STAYED** because of ME.

So it is my fault that dad hurt her.

I was **SO WORRIED** about Percy because I thought dad might hurt him too.

I had to go to the **SYCAMORE CENTRE** to be interviewed.

Talking about something that you don't want to talk about for so long is quite annoying and frustrating because some parts you have to repeat yourself in appropriate language.

They were very **KIND**.

If I didn't want to answer a question or I felt uncomfortable answering it then they would give me a glass of water to calm myself.

At the end of the interview they asked if I'd like to **TALK TO SOMEONE** about everything that happened.

Mum thought it would be a good idea so I come and meet my worker at **The SYCAMORE CENTRE** every week. It helps me understand why I feel bad sometimes.

I'd never met a **SOCIAL WORKER** before and I didn't really know what they did. I still don't know the difference between them all but they were all nice.

There was one social worker who stayed longer, and she was really, really nice. If she said she'd do something, she just got right onto it, and done it. She got Percy back!

I had to **CHANGE SCHOOLS**. I still miss my old friends, but the teachers at the new school have been really kind.

Me and mum have meetings with the teachers **every couple of months** so they can see how I'm getting on in school and if there is any concerns and stuff.

I had to speak to the court on the computer, and they just asked me questions, and I answered them as **truthfully** as I could.

I **HATED** going to court. I told the truth but **EVERY** time I answered there was another question and I felt like they didn't believe me.

At one point it felt like the judge was mad with me and then I got **ANGRY**.

They explained to me that the court decided that dad can't see me or mum anymore. I know that's a good thing.

I think I'm **GLAD** that I don't have to see him.

I'm not sure if I'll **EVER** see him again.

My name is Eve and I'm 12. I have a pet rabbit called Percy who I really love – I want to get a dog but mum says we can't just now. I like drawing anime cartoons and spending time with my friends. I live in Edinburgh. I used to live in Leith but now we live in Wester Hailes - we had to move house because of dad.

When I lived in my old house I used to go to my friend's house to get away from my dad because he was always angry and he used to hit mum. Then there was one time where he really hurt her and he hit me too. It was really scary. We went to stay at my gran's that night and I haven't seen my dad since. It's been really horrible.

I remember the police coming to gran's. We were all very upset. Mum was crying and gran was really angry at dad. The police made mum cry even more cos they kept asking questions and it sounded like they didn't believe her. I think she stayed because of me, so it is my fault that dad hurt her. I was so worried about Percy because I thought dad might hurt him too.

I had to go to the Sycamore Centre to be interviewed. There were two people and they had to record me. I could see the camera and that was a bit nerve-wracking but they were really nice and they told me what was going to happen and offered me a glass of water before we started talking. I had to take lots of breaks because there were so many questions, but they didn't mind how many breaks I took and I could go and talk to mum and gran when I needed to.

The room was nice, it wasn't like a bare room, there were lots of bright colours and a teddy that I cuddled. I remember there was a picture on the wall behind the woman who was interviewing me and I just stared at it when they asked the most difficult questions. At the end of the interview they asked if I'd like to talk to someone about everything that happened. Mum thought it would be a good idea so now I come and meet my worker at The Sycamore Centre every week. I really help her and it helps me understand why I feel bad sometimes.

There were so many people who came to gran's house straight after we moved there. I'd never met a social worker before and I didn't really know what they did. I still don't know the difference between them all, but they were all nice. It's all a bit mixed up in my head to be honest, they kept asking the same questions and sometimes I got frustrated cos I didn't know what was going on. Some of them were from Women's Aid. There was one who I saw on my own, not with my mum, she was lovely. At the beginning she helped me get Percy back from dad, I'd missed him so much. Then she helped me understand what was happening with all the court stuff. She was really patient with me when I got angry and she did what she said she'd do. I'm not sure if she really knew what would happen when we went to court though.

I had to change schools when we got the house we live in now. I still miss my old friends, but the teachers at the new school have been really kind. Mum told them what happened and they check in on me. Especially my reggie teacher and my art teacher, they go out of their way to make sure I'm okay and I've started drawing anime stories again. Sometimes I get upset and they let me take some time out or stay at home with mum and I don't get into trouble. Mum and me have meetings with the teachers every couple of months or so, so then they can see how I'm getting on in school and if there is any concerns and stuff.

I hated going to court. I hadn't heard anything for ages and I thought it was all over because everyone had gone quiet, but then I got told I had to go. Ji from Women's Aid was allowed to come with me. If she didn't I don't think I could've done it. I had to give evidence through a computer screen but I knew that dad could see me. First the judge asked me if I wanted him to take his wig off and that was good cos I think I would've laughed if he had kept it on. But then he started asking me questions and there were all these people asking me questions and I didn't know what to say. I told the truth but every time I answered there was another question and I felt like they didn't believe me. At one point it felt like the judge was mad with me and then I got angry.

Ji explained to me that the court decided that dad can't see me or mum anymore. I think I'm glad that I don't have to see him but it feels weird that I'm not ever sure if I'll see him again.

MALIK'S STORY

My name is **MALIK**. I'm 7. Lego is probably my favourite toy. Every birthday I ask for a different set, my favourites are the Star Wars ones but they are very expensive so I don't have the big ones. My aunty is teaching me how to swim and I go to judo on Friday afternoons after school.

I live in **Dalkeith** with my aunty. I used to live in **Loanhead** with mum and dad, but my dad was doing bad things to me that he shouldn't do and when I told my aunty she told lots of other people and I had to come live in **Dalkeith**.

I remember going to **SYCAMORE CENTRE**. We played **hide and seek** there, there were lots of rooms. I had to say **EVERY SINGLE** detail, which made me feel a bit uncomfortable. But then, we took breaks, and things.

In the breaks I had crisps and me and my aunty went for a walk. There was this fidget toy that was like a penguin and I played with it while I talked about things.

I've seen lots of social workers. The best one is called **RACHEL**, I see her every two weeks and one time she gave me a tiny **LEGO MODEL**.

Last week Rachel took me on a **VISIT TO THE COURT** because I think I might have to go there one day and tell the judge about what happened with dad.

There was a guy that we met, he works there, so he just came in the room with us, just a court person.

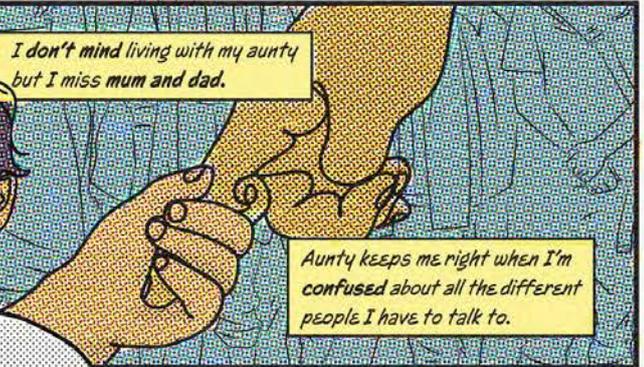
And then little bit after, maybe like a week, I don't know, that the **COURT** will happen, or trial, whatever it's called. And I'll be in, like, this little room with that man and I'll be able to, like, **SEE** in the court room from a TV.

I wish **RACHEL** or my **AUNTY** could come in with me but they are not allowed.

1 I think the police officer came to my house but I can't really remember. They were nice.

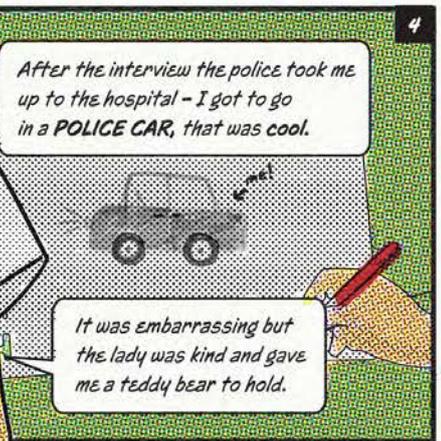


2 I don't mind living with my aunty but I miss mum and dad.



Aunty keeps me right when I'm confused about all the different people I have to talk to.

4 After the interview the police took me up to the hospital - I got to go in a **POLICE CAR**, that was cool.



It was embarrassing but the lady was kind and gave me a teddy bear to hold.

6 On the weeks I don't see Rachel I see Miss Smith in school. I get called out of class and I go into this **LITTLE ROOM** and talk to her. Sometimes she asks me things that I've already told Rachel and that is annoying.



My name is Malik. I'm 7. Lego is probably my favourite toy. Every birthday I ask for a different set, my favourites are the Star Wars ones but they are very expensive so I don't have the big ones. My aunty is teaching me how to swim and I go to judo on Friday afternoons after school.

I live in Dalkeith with my aunty. I used to live in Loanhead with mum and dad, but my dad was doing bad things to me that he shouldn't do and when I told my aunty she told lots of other people and I had to come live in Dalkeith.

I don't mind living with my aunty but I miss mum and dad. Mum didn't believe me when I told her what dad was doing so she stayed with him and I don't see her much anymore. I guess I see mum every few weeks. I hope she is okay.

My aunty looks after me and she helps me lots. It's been a bit scary living in a new place and making new friends but she is very kind and I talk to her all the time. Mostly she tells me what is happening with mum and dad and all the different people I have to talk to. I get confused who everyone is and what is happening sometimes cos there are just so many people.

I think the police officer came to my house but I can't really remember. They were nice.

I remember going to Sycamore Centre. We played hide and seek there, there were lots of rooms. There was a lady who asked me lots of questions and I had to tell them everything about dad and what he did to me. The woman asking the questions was nice. It was really long but in the breaks I had crisps and me and my aunty went for a walk. There was this fidget toy that was like a penguin and I played with it while I talked about things.

Straight from the interview the police took me up to the hospital - the woman who interviewed me and another man. I got to go in a police car, that was pretty cool. At the hospital a different man measured me and weighed me and looked at me. It was a bit embarrassing but they gave me a teddy to hold and the man was kind. I didn't see the people who took me there again, I don't know what happened to them.

There are lots of different social workers - I don't know what they all do. I think one of them is for my aunty. I see one called Rachel every two weeks, she is great - she gave me a present of a tiny lego model once. There are some other ones who I've only seen once. They are all okay but I get a bit confused. I think one is just for my Aunty? Rachel is the best, she is really kind and she doesn't make me talk if I don't want to.

On the weeks I don't see Rachel I see Miss Smith in school. I get called out of class and I go into this little room and talk to her. There is big clock that ticks really loudly and annoys me. She's very kind. Sometimes she asks me things that I've already told Rachel and that is annoying.

Last week Rachel took me on a visit to the court because I think I might have to go there one day and tell the judge about what happened with dad. We met this man who said he'll help me. I wish Rachel or my Aunty could come in with me on the day - I don't get why it has to be him. I know what the court is like now - that's good. But I hope I don't have to go, especially if it means I have to miss maths.