

B4 On the other side

Mia lived on the streets for some time. She wrote about it in a street magazine.

a) Read Mia's story. Find out why she became homeless.

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Well, I had a lot of problems and was given a hard time at home. My mother had this new boyfriend, and he moved into our flat. He was really aggressive, and he drank too much. One day he hit me for throwing his newspaper into the bin. My mother saw this, and – I just couldn't believe it – she said it was my fault! And that's when I decided to run away. I was 15.

But it wasn't easy on the streets. I thought I'd get a part-time job, but you always have to give a name and address, and that was a real problem. I didn't have an address. And then I didn't have any more money. Sometimes I was given some food, but it was never enough, so I was always really, really hungry. I started begging and stealing. I slept behind a supermarket and got up early before the delivery lorries came. I searched the bins for old bread and fruit. But I think being lonely and frightened was worse than being hungry. I found it really hard to be alone all the time. And sometimes people said horrible things to me. But then I met other homeless kids, and we hung out together for a few days. I felt a bit safer, but many of them were on drugs or alcohol – and that made me think of home and my mother's boyfriend.

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I started thinking about how I could get off the streets without giving up and going home. And then one day I got caught when I stole something in a shop. The police asked me if I wanted to spend the night in prison. I thought it would be nice to sleep in a bed and not on the streets. But in the end, being alone in prison at night was really awful. I felt so bad, and, well, I felt like I was a real criminal. Next morning, I met Eric. He was very nice. He worked for this organisation, the *Children's Society*, but I'd never heard about it. They help kids like me to get off the streets. So we sat down, and I told him my story. It was the first time someone had listened to me for weeks.

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Then I was put in a foster family in my city because I really, really didn't want to go back home. They told my mother, of course. My new family was so helpful and nice. I went



back to school for two years and got good marks. Then I started to write a lot of job applications. Eric helped me with this, too. I had a job interview with Sue Barker, a very nice goldsmith. I've been really lucky: I can do my job training with her! I really love this work. I'm 18 now, and I'm happy with my new life. I have friends and a family. I only have email contact to my mother, but that's OK.

When I think about my time on the streets, I think I learned a lot about life. When you're out on the streets, NO ONE cares if you live or die. Now I'm really happy that I was caught by the police and offered help. But I was one of the lucky ones. I should have called a helpline for teenagers who have problems or talked to someone I could trust. Running away and living on the streets was the wrong thing to do. Lilly, one of the kids I met on the streets, wasn't that lucky. I saw her in town yesterday; she looked horrible. I gave her Eric's number and really hope she'll call him to get some help. Lilly is 17 and has lived on the streets for three years now. Seeing her made me realise again what my life could have been like ...



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