



# Hidden

Photography by  
Max Alexander

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	4	<b>Emma and Matthew</b>	25
<b>About the exhibition</b>	7	<b>Jack</b>	26
<b>Meet the young carers</b>	8	<b>Jennie and Shay</b>	27
<b>Max's story</b>	10	<b>Jessica</b>	28
Our partners		<b>Becky</b>	29
<b>Rethink Mental Illness</b>	12	<b>Kirsty</b>	30
<b>DigitalMe</b>	13	<b>Sami</b>	31
<b>Fatherhood Institute</b>	14	<b>Linzi</b>	32
<b>YMCA Fairthorne Group</b>	15	<b>Matthew</b>	33
Young carers		<b>Meg</b>	34
<b>Chloe</b>	16	<b>Phoebe</b>	35
<b>Kerry</b>	17	<b>Robert</b>	36
<b>Savanna</b>	18	<b>Klarice</b>	37
<b>Bradwin</b>	19	<b>Beth</b>	38
<b>Alex</b>	20	<b>Shannon</b>	39
<b>Dana and Keavey</b>	21	<b>Jade Ewen</b>	40
<b>Young Carers Festival</b>	22	<b>Richard McCourt</b>	41
<b>Emily</b>	24	<b>Jo Whiley</b>	42

## Welcome



The Children's Society is privileged to be presenting the Young Carers in Focus (YCiF) portrait exhibition Hidden, in partnership with DigitalMe, YMCA Fairthorne Group, Rethink Mental Illness, and The Fatherhood Institute.

Hidden represents a tiny portion of the tens of thousands of young carers across the country and reveals what it's really like to be a young carer in England today. Led and informed by the young people themselves, it's a rare opportunity to take a closer look at their lives and to share their hopes and dreams, their daily struggles and mostly hidden experiences.

Told in their own words, with compelling portraits by award-winning photographer and former young carer Max Alexander, Hidden raises awareness of the needs of young carers and their families. I hope, like me, you will find their messages moving and inspiring and can take them to a wider audience, helping to make sure that their stories are no longer hidden from view.

**Matthew Reed**  
Chief Executive  
The Children's Society

### The Children's Society

The Children's Society has helped change children's stories for over a century.

We expose injustice and address hard truths, tackling child poverty and neglect head-on. We fight for change based on the experiences of every child we work with and the solid evidence we gather.

Through our campaigning, commitment and care, we are determined to give every child in this country the greatest possible chance in life.

### Young Carers in Focus (YCiF)

Young Carers in Focus (YCiF) is an exciting England-wide programme for young carers to feel empowered and supported to have a national voice. Funded by a Youth in Focus grant from the Big Lottery Fund, YCiF is delivered by The Children's Society in partnership with DigitalMe, YMCA Fairthorne Group, Rethink Mental Illness, and The Fatherhood Institute.

Led and informed by young people, this four-year programme has established a national network of young carer 'champions' aged 10-25, who communicate, share stories and campaign for the things that matter most to them using the safe social network, [www.makewav.es/ycif](http://www.makewav.es/ycif)

YCiF aims to ensure participating young carers will have improved resilience, confidence, skills and knowledge – which can improve their well-being and quality of life, particularly during transitional stages in their education as they move towards independence.

**Include**

YCiF is part of our national Include programme which campaigns for national change and promotes local best practice for young carers and their families. We have a wealth of resources and training materials for professionals, including guidance on reaching out to hidden young carers, at [www.youngcarer.com](http://www.youngcarer.com)

**Stars National Initiative**

Also part of YCiF is Stars National Initiative, a pioneering programme developed by The Children's Society to support children, young people and families affected by parental substance misuse. We work to represent the voices of those affected, provide training materials, resources, consultancy and research and strive to influence policy and practice. Our partnership work with YCiF aims to raise further awareness of children's experiences.

Resources we have produced include our 'Ask about me' training and awareness-raising DVD, our 'You are not on your own' booklet which helps children talk about their parents' drinking and a quarterly e-newsletter for practitioners working in the field of parental substance misuse.

**Big Lottery Fund**

'The Children's Society shows the huge challenges that young carers face and the significant personal cost of their caring responsibilities. We are incredibly proud to be supporting the Young Carers in Focus (YCiF) partnership and the amazing Hidden exhibition which brings these issues to light, gives young carers a voice, and ensures they have the support they need.'

**Peter Ainsworth, Chair, Big Lottery Fund**



## About the exhibition

**Hidden: England's invisible young carers**

Hidden is a compelling portrait exhibition that tells the story of England's young carers. The official figure of young carers in England is 166,000 – but this is likely just the tip of the iceberg.

Hidden reveals their often invisible lives, where every day they face huge responsibilities and unimaginably difficult choices.

In this rare insight, young carers share their side of the story. They disclose challenging stories, of shouldering overwhelming responsibilities that affect their well-being and education. Yet these are also stories of hope and courage, of children who have spoken up and created major change in schools, the health service and Parliament.

Award-winning photographer and former young carer Max Alexander captures their resilience, determination and dreams for the future.

Led by The Children's Society, Hidden is part of The Big Lottery funded Young Carers in Focus programme (YCiF). YCiF will be supporting young carers to help curate the exhibition.

## Meet the young carers



### Chloe, 16

Chloe wants to be a film director or journalist when she's older. She's been a carer for her mum and older brothers since she was eight.



### Kerry, 15

Kerry loves maths and wants to go to university and become a maths teacher at her high school. She cares for both her parents.



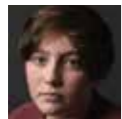
### Savanna, 7

Savanna cares for her dad and sister. Her favourite superheroes are Wonderwoman, Superman and Batman, and her favourite villains are Catwoman and Poison Ivy.



### Bradwin, 10

Bradwin wants to be a football striker when he leaves school. Messi and Ronaldo are his top two heroes. He cares for his mum who has a blood disease.



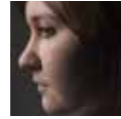
### Alex, 13

Alex has been in lots of plays and performances and says he gets his humour from his dad and acting skills from his mum. He cares for his dad who's blind.



### Dana, 16, and Keavey, 15

Dana and Keavey met at Eastern Ravens Trust Young Carers Project and are good friends. Dana cares for her mother who has Complex Regional Pain Syndrome, depression and asthma, and Keavey cares for her mum and brother.



### Emily, 15

Emily cares for her older brother who has autism, learning difficulties and epilepsy. She plans to use the skills she's learnt as a carer to follow a career in child development.



### Emma, 16, and Matthew, 14

Emma and her brother Matthew care for their mum who has diabetes. Emma has been a carer her whole life, injecting her mum with insulin when she was three. Matthew has helped his mum since he was six and has started his own YouTube channel, Wacky Wizard, to help other young carers.



### Jack, 17

Jack was 10 when he became a carer for his four siblings who are now 14, 10, eight and seven. He doesn't have much time to socialise but feels he has grown up fast because of his experience of caring.



### Jennie, 16, and Shay, 11

Jennie cares for her parents who are both alcohol dependent, and her brother Shay. She is studying health and social care and plans to pursue a career in nursing. Shay is Jennie's brother and helps her look after their parents. He's good at running and wants to be a policeman when he's older.



### Jessica, 10

Jessica cares for her seven-year-old brother who has autism. She loves playing the drums and wants to work in child-led therapy with autistic children when she's older.



### Becky, 18

Becky looked after her mum until she passed away in November 2008. She's passionate about empowering young people and fighting for the rights of young carers.



### Kirsty, 19

Kirsty now works at Kent Young Carers and is learning to drive. At home she cares for her six-year-old brother who is blind.



### Sami, 15

Sami loves being a sergeant for the St John Ambulance Brigade and seeing her family happy. She cares for her sister and older brother.



### Linzi, 18

Linzi cares for her mum, who has numerous health concerns, and her twin brother, who has Asperger's and dyspraxia. In her spare time she loves to watch movies with her mum and walk her dog Alfie.



### Matthew, 17

For Matthew, being a Young Carer in Focus champion has helped his confidence and given him 'calm vibes'. He cares for both his parents who are separated and live at opposite ends of Sheffield.



### Meg, 17

Meg cares for her mum, sister and brother. Her experience as a carer has made her grow up quickly, and she is compassionate and empathetic to others.



### Phoebe, 12

Phoebe looks after her mum who has Reynaud's Phenomenon and problems with her back and hips. She doesn't get to see her friends as she would like, but enjoys the time she spends with her mum.



### Robert, 14

Robert gets up at 5.15am to practice skating at his local rink, which helps take his mind off caring for his dad. He's also into wood carving, magic and is building a functioning Morgan sports car.



### Klarice, 10

Klarice helps care for her little brother who has Angelman syndrome. She knows sign language and uses it to communicate with her brother and other children who also have Angelman syndrome.



### Beth, 16

For five years, Beth has been caring for her mum who has chronic pain syndrome, sleep apnoea and asthma. She'd like to use the skills she's learnt as a young carer to become a social worker, working with vulnerable adults.



### Shannon, 21

Shannon cares for his dad who is paralysed from the waist down, and looked after his mum until she passed away three years ago. He loves music and plays the guitar, bass, drums and keyboard.

## Max's story

Editorial photographer Max Alexander has photographed icons from the worlds of science, astronomy and politics, including Neil Armstrong, Stephen Hawking and Nelson Mandela, for a number of prestigious organisations.

In the charity sector, Max has been working with The Children's Society for over a decade, telling the stories of young carers' lives. From the age of nine to 14, Max cared for his mother, who had schizophrenia. 'I gained so much from being a young carer', Max says. 'It gave me the resources to empathise, to be responsive to people – and this has been hugely important for my photography.'

'In this exhibition, I chose to portray these young carers as children and young people in their own right, which is what they should be. I wanted to show them as determined and resolute individuals, but vulnerable too. Their hidden stories then reveal themselves in their words.'



ABOVE: MAX WITH HIS SISTERS  
ANGELA AND CHRISTINA  
RIGHT: MAX ALEXANDER,  
PHOTOGRAPHER



Photograph by Theo Cohen

'Being a young carer gave me the resources to empathise, to be responsive to people – and this has been hugely important for my photography.'

## Our partners

### Rethink Mental Illness

Rethink Mental Illness is a charity that believes a better life is possible for people affected by mental illness. For more than 40 years we have brought people together to support each other.

We are part of the YCiF project with the aspiration of promoting young carers' well-being and future prospects. We help empower young carers to be heard by delivering sessions around their well-being, increasing their skills in looking after their own well-being and generating ideas for change in policy. This, in turn, develops their communication, resilience and confidence. All of which are vital in those key transitions into independence.

Our contributions as a partner in the YCiF project is with the hope of increasing the goals and aspirations young carers can confidently have for their future.



### DigitalMe

DigitalMe is re-imagining learning for the 21st century and equipping young people with the skills and competencies they need to thrive in work and life.

We don't accept that learning should be dull for children or irrelevant for employers. We have seen that when young people are provided with the right tools, projects and real world opportunities, amazing learning can happen.

We play a key role in the development and recognition of skills in the YCiF programme. We train champions in media creation, interviewing and blogging, providing them with the digital tools they need to get their voices heard. Alongside this, we have developed the YCiF digital badge scheme and award which enables champions to gain recognition for their skills using Mozilla Open Badge technology. We also manage the YCiF network – the programme's online hub – on safe social platform Makewaves, where champions document their journeys and young carers across England can safely connect and share their stories online.



### **The Fatherhood Institute**

The Fatherhood Institute is one of the most respected fatherhood organisations in the world. Our work focuses on policy, research and practice.

We are delighted to support YCiF with resources and ideas to ensure that services for young carers and their families include a focus on fathers and other paternal relatives.

Our vision is of a society in which there's a great dad for every child – a society that gives all children a strong and positive relationship with their father and any father-figures, supports both mothers and fathers as earners and carers, and prepares boys and girls for a future shared role in caring for children.

In working towards this vision we collate, participate in and publicise research, lobby for legal and policy changes, help public services, employers and others become more father-inclusive, and work directly with families.

We offer a wide range of training and consultancy services, including courses for family services and schools, workplace courses, and bespoke consultancy.



### **YMCA Fairthorne Group**

YMCA Fairthorne Group is a community charity, working with children and young people across Hampshire, the Isle of Wight and parts of Dorset.

Since 2000 we have worked in partnership with The Children's Society to deliver the national Young Carers Festival. Each year the festival offers a weekend of fun, relaxation and consultation for over 1,000 young people.

We use our experience in youth development programmes to deliver leadership and personal development opportunities for young people involved in YCiF. Our staff and resources are also used to facilitate workshops and residential stays including media skills and team building.





CHLOE, 16,  
SURREY  
PORTRAIT: TOP OF  
GUILDFORD CASTLE

'I didn't realise I was a young carer until I was 13, when a teacher explained to me what that was...

I've been a carer since I was eight. My brothers have learning difficulties and behavioural problems, which means sometimes they are very aggressive. I also care for my mother who has bipolar.

I want to be a film director or a journalist. My mum said: 'journalists are noseys' and I knew that was what I wanted to do!



KERRY, 15, SALFORD  
PORTRAIT: SALFORD  
YOUNG CARERS  
AFTER SCHOOL CLUB

'Young carer is a label. Labels aren't good, but labels can help in other ways...

There's stigma once people know, but it also opens doors.

I want to be a maths teacher. Go to uni. I absolutely love maths. I'd love to go back to my high school and teach. Because I've been the 'naughty kid', I'd try and understand them and fight for them.'



SAVANNA, 7,  
NORTH WEST  
PORTRAIT: AT HOME  
WITH SISTER LOIS, 16

'Being a young carer is my secret...

I don't want anything bad to happen to my family. When I found out [about YCiF] I thought 'oh there are other children like me.' I thought I was the only girl in the world who supports her family.

Sometimes I wish I had a sister who can talk, who I could talk to. We sign though. I can show you the alphabet in sign. We watch DVDs together, we play acting together – we pretend a game called 'how we're going to wake up for Christmas'.



'I want to be a footballer. A striker...

Messi or Ronaldo are my heroes – they are the top two best in the world.

Sometimes in the middle of the week you're like 'oh I need some rest! This club is a break. I meet people and socialise. They help if you're worrying. I hope mum's not slipped or something like that – they can tell you: 'it's okay'.

BRADWIN, 10,  
SALFORD  
PORTRAIT: SALFORD  
YOUNG CARERS CLUB



'It was scary to start at the young carers club, scary but good...

I found Young Carers Peterborough, as at that point I was very stressed about dad and starting secondary school. I act like a normal person – young carers are people you see on the street and wouldn't think twice about, but they're going through the same as me.

I've been in some plays and performances – I get my sense of humour from my dad and my acting skills from my mum.'

ALEX, 13,  
PETERBOROUGH  
PORTRAIT:  
PETERBOROUGH  
COMMUNITY CENTRE



DANA, 16, AND KEAVEY, 15,  
STOCKTON  
PORTRAIT: EASTERN  
RAVENS YOUNG CARERS  
PROJECT

Dana: 'I met Keavey at the young carers project...

Doing the Young Carers in Focus champion events has brought us closer together. I have other friends but I've had to grow up faster so they can seem a bit childish.'

Keavey: 'My mum was in a car crash and has mobility problems. If I did move out I'd have to live next door, otherwise what's mum going to do?'

The first time I was at Eastern Ravens I was proper shy. But now when me and Dana are together we're quite loud!'

## Young Carers Festival

The Young Carers Festival is an annual national participation event that has reached over 18,000 young carers since 2000.

Organised by The Children's Society and YMCA Fairthorne Group, it gives young carers across the UK the chance to get their voices heard about the changes they want to see.

It's also a time for them to have fun, relax and socialise, and forget about their responsibilities for the weekend.



'To me, the Young Carers Festival means freedom.'



'Being a young carer gives you life skills...

It has given me a bit of an advantage for my future career in child development. I click naturally with kids who have special needs.

I care for my older brother who is 18 and has autism, learning difficulties and epilepsy. When he collapses I'm proper scared. If I tell people about my brother I get 'oh' and they act weird. I have to choose my friends really carefully.'



EMILY, 15,  
WARRINGTON  
PORTRAIT: A YOUNG  
CARERS' RESIDENTIAL  
VIDEO SKILLS WORKSHOP



EMMA, 16, AND MATTHEW,  
14, WARRINGTON  
PORTRAIT: A YOUNG  
CARERS' RESIDENTIAL  
VIDEO SKILLS WORKSHOP

Emma: 'I've been a carer my whole life – I was injecting my mum with insulin when I was three...

The first phone number I learnt was 999. I don't see anything about young carers in the media or social media. It's frustrating; we're invisible.'

Matthew: 'I like that I can talk to people quite easily. I started my YouTube channel, Wacky Wizard, because I wanted to help other young carers. I record my thoughts and speak to school nurses about young carers. I'm really into it.'



JACK, 17,  
DARTFORD  
PORTRAIT: KENT  
YOUNG CARERS CENTRE

'School didn't know. I do my best...

The school was always too busy focusing on 'problem children' in class; as long as you're getting on with things they don't care what's going on with you.

It doesn't give me time to socialise. I've kind of missed out on bits, but I've matured because I've had experiences others haven't had. I've got the freedom to deal with things that my friends haven't got.'



JENNIE, 16 AND SHAY, 11,  
STOCKTON  
PORTRAIT: SEATON  
CAREW BEACHFRONT

Jennie: 'I find it hard to trust people, but being a YCiF champion has helped my confidence...

'I was 13 when I was referred [to the young carers project in Stockton]. I didn't know what to expect. I didn't expect what it was. I want to go into nursing – caring for people.'

Shay: 'I was nervous about coming to the club but I got used to it. I want to be a policeman. I like police. The best thing I like about myself is that I'm quite fast at running.'



JESSICA, 10, WIGAN  
 PORTRAIT: JESSICA  
 IN HER HOME WITH  
 HER DRUM KIT AND  
 BROTHER MAX

'I've been playing the drums since I was seven...

It's my hobby. But when I grow up I want to work in child-led therapy with autistic children, so I'd go to their homes and give the parents tips about how to work with their sons and daughters. When the child facilitator from Sunrise came to our home I saw mum so happy – I want to make other mums happy like that.'



BECKY, 18, SHEFFIELD  
 PORTRAIT: SHEFFIELD  
 LAW COURTS, WITH A  
 PHOTO OF BECKY'S MUM

'Most people think of the practical things, but you need to think 'emotional carer'...

It's not as obvious as the physical stuff but 90 per cent is emotional support, 10 per cent is physical or practical.

I still find it difficult to switch to 'non-carer', it's difficult not to care. You have the experience of being a carer, then go through life picking people who you can care for.'

'I care for my younger brother who's six. He developed a brain tumour and is now blind...

I have two other brothers who have a physical disability, and I'm one of seven siblings.

My family are so close-knit, I love my family and we all support each other. I'm learning to drive at the moment and working at Kent Young Carers.'



KIRSTY, 19,  
TUNBRIDGE WELLS  
PORTRAIT: KENT  
YOUNG CARERS OFFICES

'To get to the brightest bright, you have to go through the darkest dark...

As a young carer, you don't want to see what your family are going through, their pain. But there are moments of joy, real miracles. For me, this was becoming a sergeant in the St John Ambulance Brigade. It's also the moments when I see my sister, my brother or my dad happy.

MPs promise, but what do they actually do? MPs need to recognise us. We are out there. Think of us as people.'



SAMI, 15,  
PETERBOROUGH  
PORTRAIT:  
PETERBOROUGH  
COMMUNITY CENTRE



LINZI, 18,  
WORCESTERSHIRE  
PORTRAIT: LINZI'S HOME

'Young carers are not easily identified...

We don't look any different to other young people so our caring role gets hidden away. No matter what age, we all stress about pretty much anything and everything, the list is endless. My college attendance is low because I worry about leaving mum.

If there is anyone who is an inspiration to me it is my mum – she taught me whenever life gets tough there is always light at the end of the tunnel and things will be alright.'



MATTHEW, 17,  
SHEFFIELD  
PORTRAIT: PARKWAYS  
ESTATE, SHEFFIELD

'In my future I dream of a house...

I want to be settled in a relationship, with a well-paid job. I'll probably be caring for my parents.

I'd like the education system to be more supportive of young carers. Once, I tried to ring my mum at school and the teacher took my phone and said: 'you can talk to mum when you get home.' Or, I get detentions for being late – we should be allowed to be late if we're caring. They don't get it.'



'I like cats because they don't demand anything – just a bit of love and food...

The stigma is pretty awful. People don't understand it at all but can I blame them? I didn't know anything about mental health before mum got ill. They need to start having talks in primary schools about what it means to be a young carer. Introduce it earlier, so it's just a fact and children are more accepting and understand.'

MEG, 17,  
WARWICKSHIRE  
PORTRAIT: MEG AND HER  
CAT 'CHROME' AT HOME



PHOEBE, 12, WIGAN  
PORTRAIT: PHOEBE  
WITH HER MUM NEAR  
THEIR HOUSE

'Being a young carer means I get to spend time with my mum, we have nice chats while I'm doing stuff...

But it means I don't get as much time with my friends. My mum has Reynaud's Phenomenon [a condition that affects the blood supply to certain parts of the body], and problems with her back and hips. I've been caring for her ever since I could. When my little brother was born I had to look after him too, because she can't run around after him.'



'I get up at 5.15 and practice my skating at the local rink – it takes my mind off everyday life...

My dad has Huntington's disease. It damages some of the nerve cells in the brain, and affects his memory, decision-making and personality. There is no cure.

I have learnt a lot from my life and I think I have some understanding, even if it is only small, how sometimes things don't go the way that we would see as practical and easy. But when they go differently, it makes us stronger and wiser.'

ROBERT, 14, SURREY  
PORTRAIT: ICE  
SKATING RINK



'I know sign language...

It's good because when we meet other families with angels – that's what we call children with Angelman syndrome – I know what to do and how to talk to them, with sign.

About two years ago I found out about young carers. I had to move from my last school because they were calling me horrible names because of my brother. I've got an extra-special person in my life and I've been given him because I can love him.'

KLARICE, 10,  
SALFORD  
PORTRAIT: MAKING  
THE BSL SIGN  
FOR 'BROTHER';  
SALFORD YOUNG  
CARERS CLUB



BETH, 16, WIGAN  
PORTRAIT: WIGAN  
YOUNG CARERS  
PROJECT

'Young carers are not different in any way, we just have extra responsibilities...

When I first became a young carer I lost a lot of social time with my friends. But now I get to meet a lot of people like me at the young carers project.

My best quality is that I'm honest and straight to the point – if I don't like something I will say so.'



SHANNON, 21,  
WIGAN  
PORTRAIT: SHANNON'S  
HOME WITH HIS  
FATHER'S WHEELCHAIR

'I'm about to have an operation on my back as I've injured it from having to lift my dad in and out of his wheelchair...

My heart was set on music. I was planning on becoming a musician until my parents got sick and I quit college to care for them. I don't have time to be in a band – I'm going to be caring full-time for my dad for quite a while. Not everyone has good parents, but if you do, then that's why you're caring for them.'

'My father is blind and deaf in one ear, and my mum is blind in one eye with other health issues...

I'm only starting to realise what it meant to be a young carer. I didn't miss out, it wasn't a bad experience – it helped me overcome obstacles. There are definitely more positives than negatives for me.'



JADE EWEN, SINGER,  
SONGWRITER  
AND ACTRESS  
PORTRAIT: EXMOUTH  
MARKET, LONDON



'I'm holding the iconic phone that we used on Dick 'n' Dom in da Bungalow, but it has a deeper meaning too: communication...

So often when I was caring for my mum who had Dementia I struggled to communicate about what was going on. It can be very isolating being a carer. I was really happy to be asked to be the patron of Sheffield Young Carers – young carers need support and to try and continue living their own lives.'

RICHARD MCCOURT,  
ACTOR AND  
PRESENTER  
PORTRAIT: AT HIS  
AGENT'S OFFICES

'I cared for my younger sister who has Cri du Chat syndrome, a rare genetic disorder that causes behavioural difficulties. I am very close to her...

I remember people's attitudes used to get to me – people staring, it used to really annoy me. I would annihilate people with my stare: 'What are you looking at my sister for?' It's absolutely normal to love the person you care for, but also to feel cross with them sometimes.'

JO WHILEY, RADIO DJ  
AND TV PRESENTER  
PORTRAIT: FLASHBACK  
FRIDAY RECORD STORE,  
NORTH LONDON



## Thank you

Thank you to the YCiF champion project workers for supporting young carers across the country to be a part of the programme and tirelessly advocating for the best outcomes for young carers and their families.

And a special thank you to the amazing young people who have taken part in this exhibition and young carers everywhere for trusting us to share your needs, wishes and aspirations.

Exhibition art director: Dihlan Attanayake  
Portrait printing: Metro

£5.00

To support our work with young carers text **HIDDEN** to **70025** to donate **£5**

You will be charged £5 plus one message at your standard network rate. The Children's Society will receive 100% of your donation.  
Full terms and conditions are available online at [childrenssociety.org.uk](http://childrenssociety.org.uk).

The exhibition is open daily from **11-22 February 2015, 11am-6pm. Admission free.**



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**OXO TOWER WHARF**

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