

Being in foster care had both its advantages and disadvantages, many in which shaped me into the woman I am today.

Even the worst experiences I faced while in care, no matter how bad could not compare to the vial home situation I came from. I was now in a much safer place and no longer living with my parents who abused, mistreated, and neglected me. For the first time in 10 years, I was no longer a witness to domestic violence influenced by constant drug and alcohol abuse.

While in care, you attend numerous court hearings and meetings, change school's numerous times, become recipients to bullying, and sometimes really struggle with your mental and emotional health due to the continuous instability.

I changed schools four times in one semester while in state custody and it proved very difficult to transition into so many new classes. Former friends and even my cheer team began to ostracize me, spreading rumors, while other peers called you the new kid that was poor, unwanted, an orphan and would even go as far as to ask me what I did to land myself in care, feeling as if they were placing fault and blame on me.

Moving was very problematic, as you change beds, rooms, families, and your only known lifestyle. It wore on my anxiety as my belongings were strewed through different homes, lost, and unorganized. Court did become tedious, as well as meetings with GAL's, IL specialists, attorneys and numerous caseworkers, being the turnover rate is so high. However, this also allowed me first hand exposure to our justice system.

Loneliness was by far the worst part of care. The yearning to feel loved, cared about, wanted, needed, and crave for physical touch led to many sleepless nights in a new bed while crying silently until I fell asleep. Though my parents were the farthest people I wanted to see and

reunification was out of my care plan, I would have done anything just to of been held in my mom's arms. It takes a toll on your emotional wellbeing.

Although through all the bad times, there finally showed some light at the end of the tunnel. Foster care gave me hope, and removed me from horrific and unsafe living conditions with both of my parents. My time in care connected me with IL resources aiding me into permanency while living as an independent young adult after my guardianship became another unstable, unsafe, and unhealthy home.

Prior to being in state custody, I had very little knowledge of where I would go or how I would end up. There were nights I slept in the car with my mother as she abused drugs right beside me, or she would leave me with my grandparents and disappear for weeks on end, with no contact. My old soul has witnessed many things that no person, much less a child should have to see, but it allowed me this chance at a new life.

Today, because of foster care, I am living in my own apartment, for almost 3 years now, working part time as a CCA with Midnight Sun Home Care, and attending University of Alaska, Anchorage, as a full-time sophomore, making the dean's list. Although I have been blessed with the job I have and receive college funding, there are still months that prove tight while solely supporting myself. However, I am very responsible and tight with my money.

I am thankful beyond words for the opportunity to attend college in hopes for graduating with my BSW, then onto my Masters of Social Work degree, becoming a LCSW. The financial support and mentored help of Amanda Metivier, of The Child Welfare Academy has continue to lead me to success. This would have never been possible without entering foster care.

I stand proud to of spent time in state custody being the upmost gracious for my experience in the system. It has changed and shaped every aspect of my life; from the better woman I have become to the way in which it provided and then coursed the route of my college education and now one day my career.

Finally, another great aspect of being in care are the brothers, sisters, opportunities and family I will have for life. The youth in care I have met through Facing Foster Care in Alaska have led impactful change and influence in my life. We are blessed with opportunities that involve community outreach such as traveling to the state capital and advocating policy change on the house floor. We are also a support system for each other, and as an only child, I now have brothers and sisters I can depend on for life.

Foster care never defined me, but it helped make me, and I will always be proud to stand up for any foster youth, legislation, and for the statistic that I beat.