

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/food-for-the-body-and-the-soul/>

Campaign and Advocacy

By Justin Kidder

Food and helping young people are my twin passions. I am the chef and owner of [Milk & Butter Catering, LLC](#) in Houston, Texas. Yeah, Houston. Living through the aftermath of the 2021 winter storm has been a heck of a roller coaster! I went 6 days without power and water in freezing temperatures. And the end result was me having to move because my place has been damaged from pipes bursting. Its been horrible but Im staying strong! A lady connected me to a donor who was able to donate \$100 for food since all my food went bad. So Im staying positive.

When the pandemic hit I moved from Indianapolis to Texas because everything is bigger in Texas, and I have big plans. Its been a slow start, there is so much competition, but Ill get there. We prepare and serve just everything, but no fried food. Salmon and steak are my specialties. I cook by instinct, no recipes for me. [But here is one I put together for my Stuffed Salmon with Asparagus.](#)

I love being my own boss. I have the power to give people the best of the best. My philosophy is that food is about a lot more than just eating. Its how we celebrate, or make a bad day better. I just did a proposal dinner for two. Prepared a perfect meal, flowers and the whole thing. And, mask on, I served it to the couple. I gave them the experience of a lifetime.

I was born in California 27 years ago. I remember nothing about my first two years of life. But I know I didnt get off to a good start. Starting when I was 2 or so, I was in and out of foster homes in 3 different states. Sometimes people really wanted to help me. But it was always the same. I acted out, I was trouble: Justin needs to leave.

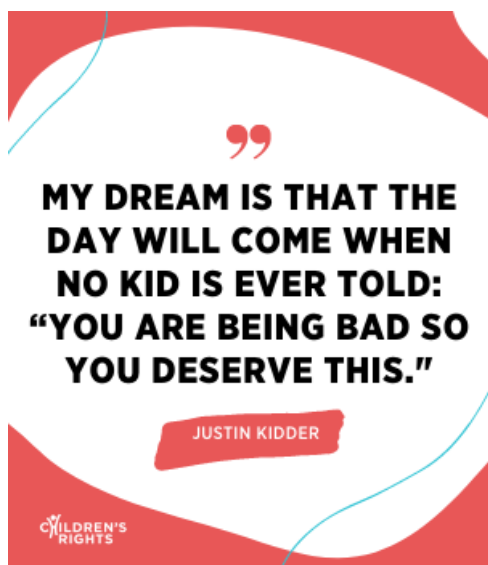
You could say I was lucky until I wasnt. I didnt get to my first group home until I was older. But I was in institutions from the age of 16 to 18. So in the prime years of really trying to gain relationships and friendships.

I couldnt join ROTC. I couldnt play ball. Going into college I felt like I wasnt as successful, simply because I didnt have the support or the guidance that I really wanted from my high school teachers. I was cut off from my friends especially my all-time best friend. She and her family were my outlet. They were only 10 minutes down the road but it might as well have been another planet.

I didnt feel like the case workers were on my side. There were no adults who really seemed to care. You are on your own in a threatening place. It was me against the world. One time my best friend came to see me. When I went outside to meet her they thought I was running away and they picked me up and slammed me, they said they would call the police. They basically attacked me.

The US is focusing on ending police brutality, but I think it is just as important to end group homes because they do just as much damage to the body and the soul.

Eventually I decided the only person who was going to help me was me. I learned to cook for kids in the group home. I felt a calmness. Making food bought me a way to connect with people.



The one good thing I can say about group care is that I was forced to save my money, so by the time I aged out, I had some savings. But that would be the only thing. Group homes are bad for kids. States use them as a last resort. When there is no other option for permanency or placement thats their favorite go to. This is not a nutritious way of living. You are not seen as an individual with unique needs and talents that can be developed. There is no season to taste happening in institutions. No nurturing goes on. They are places to hold you until you age out, without in any way educating you or making you ready to live

independently.

In addition to running my business, I volunteer as a Jim Casey Young Fellow, working to reform the foster care system. My dream is that one day no kid is ever told: You are being bad so you deserve this. That every child lives inside a circle of love. With adults who don't give up on them like so many gave up on me. Adults who will help them get ready to be adults themselves.

Visit our [Tales of Strength & Love](#) page for more stories like Justins.

Thousands of children are trapped in systems they do not understand. These systems fail to understand that children need time and space to be children and develop the foundations that allow them to be who they truly are.

Help us build a better childhood for kids everywhere and [donate to our Childhood is Our First Right](#) campaign today.

Make sure to follow our Childhood is Our First Right campaign on [Instagram](#), [Twitter](#), and [Facebook](#) for stories, news, events, and actions you can take to help build a brighter future for children.

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Email Address

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