

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/my-story-is-my-strength/>

Campaign and Advocacy

By Jordan Thompson



I was born in Nashua, New Hampshire. When I was three months old, my mother died. My sister and I went to live with our father in Hartford, Connecticut. We spent the next ten years there. Hartford is a difficult place for a child to grow up. It's a rough city with failing infrastructure, high unemployment, severe poverty, and street violence.

Growing up, I wasn't allowed to have friends outside of school because my father insisted my neighborhood was too dangerous for them. My family was relatively poor already, but when the recession hit, my father lost his job and things got worse. My father was emotionally manipulative and physically abusive. I wasn't particularly shy about my Queer identity as a kid, and he was violently homophobic. Naturally, I spent most of my time alone in my bedroom. Books became my friends. I remember seeing myself in *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket, a popular children's series about three neglected siblings who defy seemingly insurmountable odds to prevail against loss, treachery and villainous adults.

Meanwhile, I was desperate for an escape from my real-life series of unfortunate events. My father had worked at a youth detention center before I was born, and he raised me like I was living in one. I often felt like a prisoner. We had a pantry full of food, but my sister and I didn't have access to it. For years, we were only allowed two meals a day, two bologna sandwiches. I haven't had a bologna sandwich since.

School was the obvious outlet for my frustrations. I constantly got into trouble and was quickly labelled as insubordinate by my teachers. As my behavior and academic performance both worsened, my father's reactions got more violent. After one particularly damaging incident, I decided to run away from home. I never lived with my father again. I spent months without a home, couch surfing in the living rooms of random relatives until I eventually found my way back to New Hampshire. My grandmother had agreed to take me in, and I imagined a better life in her care. Things didn't turn out as I expected.

I experienced a lot of culture shock in New Hampshire. I was one of the only kids of color in an almost entirely white school. My grades didn't improve and I began to feel increasingly isolated in a state full of strangers. I continued to lash out at my teachers and peers. My behavioral issues came to a dramatic climax when at just 12 years old, I was arrested for assault. I remember spending the night in a tiny, cold jail cell and thinking, how did I get here? Shortly afterwards, I was placed in a group home, where I lived for several years until I aged out on my 18th birthday.

The stigma of being a youth in care was one of the most difficult aspects of my teenage years. In my seemingly endless quest to be perceived as normal, I fought a silent battle to hide the fact that I lived in an institution. I became more active in community service. At one point, I had three jobs. Despite my tumultuous circumstance, I was able to graduate on time. No one knew where I lived the entire time.

I started college a few months shy of my 18th birthday. I aged out of the child welfare system shortly afterwards, and I was immediately faced with a choice: to attend college full-time as a traditional student, or to work full-time and support myself independently. This is a difficult decision that many young people aging out of care have to make. It is estimated that less than 10 percent of foster youth successfully complete degrees at college or university due to a lack of financial resources and familial support. I realized that I had a strong passion for advocacy and civic engagement, so I decided to put my dreams of a political science degree on hold to pursue field work instead.



That decision opened a lot of doors for me. I interned on Hillary Clintons presidential campaign. I shadowed Members of Congress in Washington, D.C. I ran for public office twice, worked with the Obama Foundation and served as staff for Vice President Kamala Harris on her 2019 presidential bid. I began to tell my story and the experience was transformational.

I now work for the ACLU in New Hampshire as a Racial Justice Organizer, empowering young people, particularly Black youth, to organize around issues of racial justice within their own communities.

I founded a Black Lives Matter chapter here in Nashua. I write grant proposals. I testify before legislatures, write legislation, and use my platform to speak out on issues like law enforcement accountability, prison abolition and transforming the child welfare system. The time I spent in the system fuels my work today.

I remember saying goodbye to my father when I was 11 years old. I had a little knapsack on my back that I packed myself. In it was a copy of The Diary of Anne Frank, my favorite book at the time, which is just about the only thing I still own from my childhood. It may be severely water damaged and heavily worn but its a prized possession. I was so inspired by Anne Frank as a kid. At such a young age, she found wisdom and strength in the face of terror and told her story.

Ive worked hard to find my voice, and Im grateful to have a career today that allows me to use it and my experience in pursuit of justice for my people. I have learned not to be ashamed, because I am a survivor. I have a lot to be proud of.

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

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.

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First Name	Last Name
Email Address	