

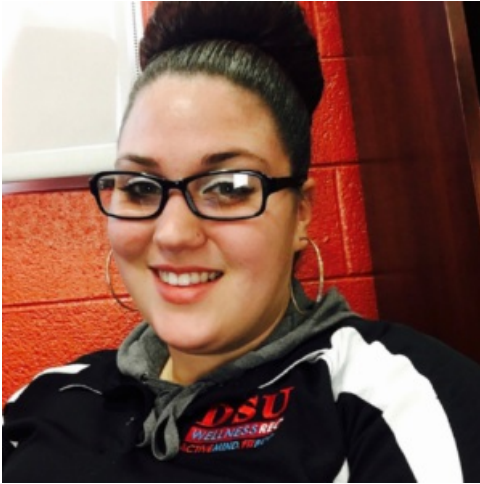
Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/doing-what-i-was-meant-to-do/>

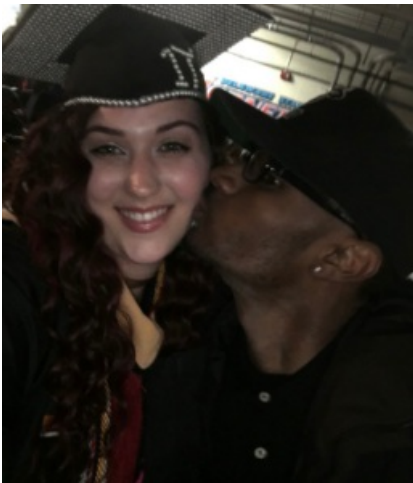
Campaign and Advocacy

By Maegan Sol



As a drug and alcohol counselor, I help pregnant women in rehabilitation avoid opioids and reduce withdrawal symptoms. Ironically I did not intend to be in this field, I wanted to work with youth in foster care.

I believe now that I am meant to be doing what I am doing. By working with women in poverty who suffer from addiction, I am helping to get to the root of some of the major issues causing youth to go into foster care. My parents are addicts; because of that I spent more than 20% of my childhood in the foster care system. My goal is to do what I can to improve the system for the young people today who are in it, and those who will come after. I want to improve outcomes for youth who have experienced care by creating systemic change.



I earned my Bachelor of Social Work (BSW) in May of 2017 and my Master of Social Work (MSW) in May of 2018. I have completed my clinic hours and am working towards becoming a Licensed Clinical Social Worker. This would open my career up to many more opportunities. I have been told you're so successful. Look what you've accomplished in spite of your childhood.

Although I am proud of myself and my accomplishments, it makes me reflect on all of the other people who have experienced care, but did not have the same outcome. That's not how it should be. People like me should not have it so hard. It should not be that difficult to succeed, or even just simply make it out of poverty.

On my fourth birthday, my mom and stepdad left me and my two-year-old sister in a hotel room. My mom said she would be back with candy, and if we didn't go to sleep she would take our stuffed animals. I left the room, took the elevator and asked the front desk for my mom; who returned 6 hours later. The police were called.

And that's how my time in care began. We started out in an emergency placement. We were placed with families again at ages 4/5 and 6/7. I last lived with my mom when I was 12. She said something hurtful while having a panic attack, so I left. Eventually my sister and I were placed in a group home. I remember how cheap and uncomfortable the furniture was, how empty and cold it felt.

When we got there we had head lice, so the entire house was treated. The staff made it pretty obvious that it was me and my sister who

brought lice into the house; this caused problems at school. I got into a fight when I found out one of the other girls in the house was telling people at school about it. This made me feel even more alone during this transition into an already intimidating facility. Because that is what it was, a facility, and not a home.

I remember the first time that I was in trouble at the group home and I was put on level 0. My mom always taught me and my sister that we were to share everything, and always have each others backs. I was walking into the dining room and the staff asked me whos pants I was wearing; they were my sisters. I was immediately given 24 hours of level 0 for lending and borrowing which was a 0 tolerance policy. When I explained that they were my sisters I was told we cant prove that you two are sisters. And again I found myself feeling empty, sitting in a dining room away from everyone with no privileges. All because of a principle concept me and my sister were taught to believe and practice our whole lives. This was just the beginning of how the placement that was supposed to keep us together, began to drift us apart.

My sister and I hardly ever got into trouble. Thats why I hated it. No matter how hard I tried I was still treated like everybody else. They didnt trust you. They graded you on behaviors, like brushing your teeth, making the bed, when you came downstairs. Every day someone elses judgement determined what we could or could not do the next day. I believe there are better ways to teach respect and discipline.

We were treated like inmates. Even to get friends to come over was a shaming experience. Some people didnt even know what foster care was. They had to request in writing a week in advance, give an ID in order to see me. It looked like we had done something wrong or why would we be there? Needless to say I stopped asking to go with my friends.

A positive aspect was developing relationships with two people who worked there; a counselor and a house parent. I had people I could talk to and trusted. Having a good counselor was important because counseling was mandatory. I remember the first counselor they took me to actually asked me How does this make you feel? I thought it must be a joke. I requested a new counselor the same day.

When it comes to the other staff at the facility it was like anything you say can and will be used against you. As if I had to tip toe to make sure I dont say the wrong thing and unknowingly incriminate myself. They are paid to be there really just watching, not caring for me. Keeping me accounted for. Dont go down stairs. Dont run away. Dont get a snack. They were the gate keepers and not the parental figures that I needed in my life. Although some staff may have really cared for me, the barriers of the rules and regulations the group home implemented prevented us from developing any real relationship.

I felt like I lost everyone. Even living with my sister, I feel like I lost connection to her. It was a social setting, not a family setting. When we finally left the group home because we felt we outgrew it, we continued to grow apart. It was hard, I had been her protector. That place robbed us of each other.

I moved out, lived with an older sister, got a job at McDonalds, made my own money, paid for my own stuff. I was in my own apartment by age 18 and in the 11th grade. I knew I wanted to go to college, and I only considered one: Delaware State University. There was a foster care program at DSU that allowed me upper classman housing (a 12 month leases instead of having to go home on breaks) and to keep my car on campus as a freshman. Things worked out for me. But I dont want to be the exception. Less than 3% of youth who age out of care will earn a 4 year degree by the age of 25. Going to DSU changed my life.

Institutionalization focuses on structure to the detriment of everything else. You dont just lose a family. You lose the ability to develop social skills, to form and maintain relationships. You actually learn how to operate in an abnormal environment that is more like a hospital or a prison. This encourages youth who have lived in group homes to seek what they have known as adults, which is institutional settings instead of normalcy. Youth who age out of care are more likely to be incarcerated. Youth in care are also over diagnosed and treated at a young age for mental health disorders; which can encourage them to believe they need hospitalization. Both scenarios are increased when that youth has lived in a group home.



I was lucky to only have spent two and a half years in a group home. I continue to heal from my trauma. Ive used my lived experience in an attempt to make life better for others. I still do not have positive relationships with my parents, but my partner and I have been together for ten years. We just bought a house, got engaged, and on my 28th birthday I found out that we are having a baby. I am happy now even though I went through a lot as a child. My message to others is that there is hope, there is a way, and I hope that sharing my story will inspire change. It should not be this hard to be successful and I will do what I can to inspire the systemic change needed to support one of our nations most vulnerable population; young people in the foster care system.

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

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.

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First Name	Last Name
Email Address	

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