

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/?p=12909>

Campaign and Advocacy

By Khadija Adula

This blog was written before the COVID1-19 crisis hit. We got back to Khadija to ask her about how she is doing: *COVID- has brought up issues of inequity, such as housing, education, healthcare, etc., that Ive known and cared about since I became aware of them years ago. It is my hope that those who didnt have to think much about access, will now advocate for equal rights across the board. Too many have been willfully ignorant for too long. We cannot return to normal, things have to change. It is even more upsetting that a great percentage of those who are considered essential during this crisis do not make a livable wage. Im hoping people will learn to care for others as much as they do for themselves.*

Im 29 years old. It graduated from college two years ago. It took me a while, but I know I beat the odds. A huge percentage of kids who spend time in foster care never graduate from high school, let alone college. I am grateful to the good people who helped me along the way. But I have no heroes. I did this on my own. I raised myself.

I was born in Congo, Brazzaville to Malian parents. When I was four I was sent to France to live with my fathers first wife. Eventually the entire family came to the US.

Our home in the Bronx was chaotic. Overcrowded, with all the stressors you would imagine in a polygamous household. My father was abusive. He isolated all of us kids and moms. I struggled. I was angry with my father and my mom, even though I know now she had no choice. I poured myself into sports at school, stayed away from home as much as I could.

I was always a rebel, and eventually I got into trouble. Three years after coming to New York I was placed in foster care. My first placement was in a group home. I felt liberated but it lacked order and stability. Although I was released back to my birth parents a year later, my home situation had not improved. It was still unsafe and unhealthy. I knew I had to escape so I ran. The family of a friend finally took me in.

Around this time, I learned about female genital cutting in West Africa. This inspired my dream of working in Mali as a gynecologist to help prevent this practice from happening to other young girls.

For years as a kid I worked menial jobs at 13 I was fulltime at McDonalds using a false ID because I was under age. I attended three different high schools. I did just enough to pass my classes. But my living situation was not good. I watched what drug addiction did to people in my neighborhood. I knew I had to change the trajectory of my life. Working at fast food restaurants would not allow me to reach my dream of becoming a doctor.

Just before my high school graduation, I learned that my only chance at higher education and legal employment was to reenter the foster care system and get my legal status corrected. This time I got a caseworker who really cared. On her last day in that job she helped me register for classes at Borough of Manhattan Community College (BMCC).

BMCC became my second home. I graduated with honors, applied to Cornell University and accepted. It seemed too good to be true. And it was. Complete culture shock. My life had taught me to be careful, not outgoing. I had trouble making friends, connecting with my roommates, and adjusting academically. I was not prepared, emotionally, socially, or academically. I became severely depressed, took a medical leave, tried again in the fall, but I just couldnt stay.

If there is one thing my life has taught me, its the importance of being resilient. Cornell didnt work out, but I refused to give up on my dream of becoming a doctor. I knew getting a degree was a key step toward that goal. In 2018, I received my bachelors degree in biology from City College.

Today I work at Mount Sinai Hospital. The job is helping me get hands-on medical experience while I decide how to move forward academically.

I am not giving up on my dream.

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Childrens Rights met Khadija through our wonderful friends at Culture for One, an organization that for ten years has been bringing the arts and culture of New York City to children in the foster care system. Khadija went on an excursion and met Culture for Ones founder, Linn Tanzman. Linns support and friendship sustain her to this day.

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

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