

# Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/i-didnt-know-i-was-this-strong/>

## Campaign and Advocacy

By Sadaf Sheikh

I was born in New Jersey 21 years ago but moved as a baby to Pakistan with my parents and half-sister. Fast forward to 2018 when, halfway through my junior year at Medgar Evers College in Brooklyn, I moved into The New Yorker Hotel in Manhattan. Me! Living at an iconic New York landmark, built in 1930, 40 stories high, home to celebrities and super stars. I felt like one myself, after the road I had traveled to get there.

My father abused my mother and the kids for years. She had to send my sister back to the states to keep her safe. But she couldn't protect herself. I can never forget the day. My mother was really fighting back. I wouldn't let go of her hand. Suddenly he pulled out a knife and started stabbing her everywhere. Every time he stabbed, I hit and slapped him.

My mother spent a month in the hospital, although to this day she has things that still aren't right. My father was arrested based on my statement. I was 12. Three months later he threatened to kill me. My mother knew he could do anything he wanted; he had money; he had connections. I had to go. So, once again my mother sent a daughter away to save her life.

I was sent to join my sister in New York who, the way things turned out, had been placed in foster care. I was lucky enough to be allowed to join her. I was excited to be with her, and grateful to our foster mom. I appreciated what she was doing for us. But I could also see that things were not right. My sister was struggling, she wasn't getting the support she needed. And our foster mother was unstable. She would lock the food closet so we couldn't eat.

My situation was crazy, and I needed peace and love. I had been very traumatized and had nightmares a bad foster care home was just too much. Our caseworker would come and I would cry. We eventually got put in to a better more supportive home. My sister aged out. I was fine. I started college and opted to live in a dorm. I wanted that experience, that independence. I loved it. But this upset my foster mom; she took it personally. Soon she gave ten-day notice that she wanted me to leave she didn't care where I went she just wanted me gone. I was heartbroken, even though living there had been hard. I loved her little boys, and I loved to come home and be there. It was a lot to handle.

After a brief stay with my sister (and my amazing year at The New Yorker Hotel) I now live in my own apartment, and I am following my dream of becoming a social worker. I was inspired by a social work intern who had been good to me; she was young and more like a friend. I have one semester to go to get my degree.

From my own experience and my studies I know there are good things about foster care, but there are things that need to be done better. Bad case workers or foster parents shut a kid down. I know, because I was shut down. I had people tell me to shut up and take it. I don't want that to happen to other kids. I want to help fix the system.

When the coronavirus hit I lost my job at K-Mart. I was planning on working this summer as a YMCA youth counselor but that's not going to happen. But I am one of the lucky ones. I age out on my birthday, May 16 but I will be okay because I am collecting unemployment and CASA is helping me apply for food stamps and Medicaid.

The same is not true for too many kids aging out, who without help are at risk of homelessness and hunger. That is why I was so proud to be a part of this [news story urging Governor Cuomo](#) to extend benefits to kids aging out for 180 days while this crisis rages. Other states are doing it, why not New York?

Sometimes my lived experience makes me laugh. I didn't know I was this strong. I guess am. I might have some temporary setbacks, but I will have my career. My voice will be heard.

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Sadaf offers words of hope in a USA Today article, [Foster care teens death draws scrutiny to group home outbreaks: Who is looking out for these children?](#)

So many kids in foster care, they can't fight, they can't speak for themselves.

*Children's Rights met Sadaf through to our wonderful friends at CASA New York City, an organization that protects the basic needs and well-being of children in foster care by facilitating appropriate treatment intervention and timely case resolution.*

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

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Email Address

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