

Children's Rights

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<https://www.childrensrights.org/?p=12888>

Campaign and Advocacy

By Bilonda Tshimanga

Im a junior in college, and like students across the globe, COVID- 19 has thrown everything down around me. I would have never expected school would shut down, let alone our country and much of the economy. But it is sort of funny, having spent time in foster care actually makes me really good at adapting. I am a chameleon. I dont like it that I had to move home. I miss my apartment on campus. But when we were given the option to stay or leave, I felt safer being back in to my foster parents home. I miss my independence though.

My mom and dad are Congolese. I have three older siblings, two brothers and a sister. We moved to Fort Worth Texas as a family, but my dad went back to Africa and left my mom on her own. I was six when her green card expired. She couldnt pay to fix her immigration status; she was new to the country and had no support. She couldnt comprehend how the US worked.

When I was in the fourth grade a neighbor called Child Protective Services because we were hungry. That started a cycle of going back and forth between foster homes and my mom. She struggled with depression, was all on her own, separated from her kids. My brothers are older and they stepped up to help mom. But my sister and I moved around a lot. We lived with friends for a while, then wed move on.

I wound up in a group home. I hated it because I didnt like being with so many other kids. It was just too much no privacy, too many rules and no sense of being close, no parenting. After six months I was moved to a foster home in Dallas. The foster mom who was black didnt go for me. She thought I had been white-washed that I had gotten white. The moving around went on: half a dozen times to different friends homes and four to five foster homes.

When I was a sophomore in high school I finally got some stability. A foster care counselor who places kids in foster homes found out I needed a home and offered to take me in temporarily, and then invited me to stay. Ive been here ever since.

My older brothers set the example by both getting college degrees. My sister is a senior at University of North Texas. My mother was living with my brother until last summer, when we siblings collectively decided to send my mom back to Africa. My brothers have now left Texas for jobs in California.

Im 20-years old. The older you get, the more you need a mom. I chat with her on WhatsApp. I liked to think Im logical, that I turned off the whole feelings switch. But there are times when I wish I were normal. That I had a mom and a dad and a home. I dwell on it, which isnt good. So I let it go.

I miss school, and I want to go back to the boyfriend I care about and the same best friend Ive had since high school.

I love the life Ive made. And thats what I would say to a little girl going through what I went through. Things seem tough, but if you make the right choices study, get the grades youll thank yourself later. Foster care is suffocating, but its temporary. It doesnt define you. You get to do that.

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First Name Last Name

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