Against All Odds

More than a quarter of young men in foster care end up in jail after they age out of the system. Kendall Franklin, 20, found the support he needed to stay on track.

February 22, 2007 As told to Kellee Terrell

When I was 12, youth services yanked me and my three siblings out of my mother's home in New York City. Her boyfriend had just been locked up. She was taking it pretty hard and had basically stopped taking us to school. That night, we stayed in a group home with other foster kids. I was terrified we were going to be split up and shipped to different homes. Luckily, my aunt stepped in and became our foster mom for two years—until my mother regained custody of us. At that point, we moved from Harlem to the Bronx.

Growing up, I was shy, and I didn't have much confidence; but thankfully, I was never a follower. While some of my friends drank beers and hollered at girls on the corner, I knew that I wanted to get an education and better myself.

With heavy encouragement from my mom, I graduated from high school and started attending Hunter College in New York City to major in accounting. Just when life seemed on the up, in February 2005, we were evicted and sent to a homeless shelter. For eight months, we were forced to live in one room with five beds. I was so ashamed that I considered quitting school for the semester.

To help get me on track, my mother signed me up for a seminar hosted by the Youth Advocacy Center (YAC), an organization that helps foster teens learn how to interview for jobs, promote themselves in career settings and find mentors. I became hooked after one session. I knew that this was going to help me figure out my career.

After graduating from the program, my grades improved, and my confidence was boosted. Soon after, I began interning for YAC (www.youthadvocacycenter.org; 212.675.6181) as an outreach worker, helping youth just like me. Last October, I was awarded New York City's Urban Hero Award, honoring young leaders who, despite obstacles, have made a difference in their communities.

I always knew I deserved to succeed; I just needed guidance. Thanks to YAC, success is now a reality.

GETTING HELP...

In some states, black children make up more than half of the foster care population—in DC, it is a staggering 98%. These organizations provide resources for foster parents and children:

Casey Family Services
www.caseyfamilyservices.org; 203.401.6900
This group provides direct services to foster families in New England and Baltimore; it also offers national resources on adoption and info about raising kids with special needs.

National Foster Parent Association
www.nfpainc.org; 800.557.5238
NFPA's website provides regulations on state foster care and corporal punishment, news about upcoming conferences and financial tips.

National Network for Foster Children and Foster Youth
www.fyi3.com; 877.216.7379
Designed for foster care teens, this website contains scholarship information and message boards.

For more foster care resources, call 411 to find your local child welfare department.

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