

# Our Stories are Your Stories

A Children's Village Anthology  
2015

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# I'm not a bad kid

I was trying to sell a cell phone to a guy when we started arguing. The police came and I was arrested. This was my second arrest and I was 18-years old. I'm not a bad kid. I like sports, hanging out with friends, but I find myself in positions to make money and get into trouble. I should have canceled the whole transaction once the conversation began to turn into an argument.

The Arches Program has helped me return to school, work, and be home at a reasonable time. I've also made adjustments to who I hang out with. The Arches Program made me see things a little differently. I learned how to think and handle situations better. I took advantage of the program and I'm grateful I was chosen to be part of trips to poetry slams, basketball games, and theme parks. Overall, the program has helped me with a combination of information, encouragement, and some fun along the way.

- Benny

*(Since becoming involved with CV's Arches Program, Benny is taking GED classes at Bronx Community College and planning to attend college. He also started participating in an employment program.)*

*CV's Arches Transformative Mentoring Program works with young adults on probation to disentangle from the criminal justice system. Skilled mentors guide participants through journaling, goal-setting, and engaging in field trips, education, and employment activities.*

# My life was never still

My mom was a prostitute and a crack addict.

My parents had been getting a check for me. My mom took the check and spent it on whatever – drugs, alcohol, etc. She came back a week later and her and my dad got into an argument and he tried to kill her because he was upset that she took the check that was supposed to be for my clothes and food and everything. My mom called the cops, and my dad went to jail. My dad came back and we moved in with my grandmother then we went into a shelter because we were homeless.

My life was never still because I moved from shelter to shelter to shelter with my dad.

When I was 9, I moved to Staten Island, where we had a real apartment – just me and my dad. I grew up there and it was a really cool place. A little bit after my 10th birthday, I was down the block at my friend's house and we saw smoke coming from my apartment. After that, we stayed in my uncle's house for about a year.

Around my 11th birthday, we got back into a shelter in Harlem. 137th and Lexington. We stayed there for a long time.

When I turned 12, I started running away. ACS put me in a foster home. I felt like an intruder into someone's family. So I ran.

That's when I became a street kid. I ran away from that first foster home, got into the streets, and became a part of the Occupy Wall Street group. I would sleep out in "Zucchini" park.

ACS found me again 2 days after my 13th birthday. I got put into another foster home. I ran from that foster home the same exact day. I kept feeling intrusive. I always felt like I was intruding into their life. You don't even know me that well, why are you calling me your "son"? It made me so uncomfortable.

I can't even count how many foster homes I was in. Over 15 at least.

The longest I ever stayed was 3 days. The only place I felt safe was the street. One day I got in trouble and I was arrested.

That's how I ended up at CV.

Besides living with my dad, CV is the longest place I've ever lived. I don't want to run from here.

I'm not saying that I love here or want to be here for the rest of my life. But, it's a good place for people to build better relationships. You can get jobs here. I'm on the basketball team. There's recreation. The cottage staff want to see you succeed, get out of here, and chase after your dreams.

I never stayed in a foster home long enough to feel that same connection.

One of the reasons that I stay is my mentor. She's funny. Always in a joyful mood. She always helps with stuff that I need and she makes time for me whenever I need to see her. She never gets impatient because I like to talk a lot. We meet for lunch. We go off campus. We also volunteer at the animal shelter where the people and pets really like me. Doing this makes me feel better. The animals there and I have a lot in common.

I'm 14 now. I don't see my dad often, but it's cool to see him. I haven't talked to my mom in a while. I need to behave. I want to live a life like a regular teenager. I don't want to keep having situations. If I have any more, I'm going to completely break.

I'm an intelligent kid. I'm street smart. I'm book smart. I can handle myself on the streets. I can handle myself in the school. Enough about me.

- Name withheld to protect privacy

*The author is part of CV's Non-Secure Placement Program which is an alternative to incarceration. Statistics show that 83% of youth who spend time in juvenile detention facilities re-offend within three years. CV's program aims to improve their odds by providing a structured environment, connections to adults who care for them, education, and an opportunity to see a better future.*





## I found my voice and my confidence

CV's Safe Harbour group allowed me to keep an open mind and learn the difference between healthy and unhealthy relationships. This was useful and relevant in my life because I was able to see my self-worth. It allowed me to gain the confidence to walk away from what I believed was an unhealthy relationship.

I found my voice and my confidence. I am understanding when it comes to the needs of others, I have learned communication skills that enable me to actively listen and give feedback and now I am able to mentor other girls to love and care for themselves.

- Nayla

*(Nayla joined CV's Safe Harbour group at 16-years old. She was a shy girl who lacked confidence and was engaged in high-risk sexual behaviors. Now 18-years old, Nayla is mentoring sexually exploited girls in Westchester County.)*

*Several thousand children are sexually exploited every year in New York State through trafficking and prostitution. The Safe Harbour Program provides therapy and creative group expression with the goal of helping girls and boys who have been exploited gain the confidence and courage to return safely to their families and communities.*



## These women touched my heart

I am so thankful for each and every person for their contributions in my life. Throughout it all, I grew mentally, spiritually, and even physically aware of myself.

First off, The Sanctuary was really my SAVIOR!! The Lord was answering my prayers when I was told by police officers that they find a safe place for me to stay at 1am. That night I was with a group of knuckleheads in their backyard, sleeping at their house knowing that I overstayed my welcome. I remember being at the Sanctuary for the first time. Everyone was so REFRESHING and Beautiful!!!

Ms. Jhenee was so sweet, Miss Pam was hilarious, and Miss Jennifer just always has the right answers to comfort you. These women were the first people who really touched my heart and healed it so much from the wear and tear damage that caused me to act out. I would really be happy because Miss Mims ALWAYS let me help cook and I loovvee to cook for people.

My work and experiences with staff educated me so much about myself and my interaction with others. Miss Jennifer clearly saw that living with my aunt was a toxic situation so she introduced me to the Transitional Living Program.

I am so happy, I am so grateful, I am so fortunate, and I am so loved by so many people. I am really, really, really grateful for each and every person. I really wanted EVERYONE to know that you are special in your own ways.

All of the new staff who haven't worked with me, I hope that the new generations of the Sanctuary Program and the Transitional Living Program become better and safer places for each youth that steps foot into the door.

- Mayisha



*CV's Sanctuary is the only shelter for runaway or homeless teens in Westchester County. Teens typically stay for less than two weeks, at which point 90% of them return to a parent or guardian with supportive services. Occasionally, when an older teen has no family to return to, he or she can move into a shared apartment as part of CV's Transitional Living Program. Youth can stay for 18 months while they attend school and/or work to save for a permanent apartment.*



## I believe that there is no better investment

As a resident of Scarsdale for over 40 years, I have been aware of Children's Village and its good work. My husband David graduated from Scarsdale High School in 1963 and, as class president, selected CV as a place where concerned classmates volunteered their time. Today, David is a CV trustee and a school board member of Greenburgh Eleven, the campus school district.

Since we like to do things together, it was natural for me to volunteer with him first, as a couple by becoming mentors to Andrew and then on my own helping with fundraising and committing time to brightening the lives of the children.

I believe that there is no better investment of time and treasure than in the life of a child. As President Obama said, "If you go out and make some good things happen, you will fill the world with hope... you will fill yourself with hope." The children of CV are among society's most vulnerable and they desperately need hope, a hope which comes from caring adults who show them love and believe in them.

I have found great personal satisfaction in what I do for CV. I enjoy the staff with whom I work and have come to know and respect. I like sharing with my husband in something to which he has also committed so much time and energy.

- Cheryl S. Smith

*Cheryl and David Smith are part of CV's mentoring program, which pairs concerned individuals with youth, many of whom have no family connections.*