

THE CHILDREN'S VILLAGE  
ANTHOLOGY

2020



OUR STORIES ARE  
YOUR STORIES



## KEEPING CHILDREN SAFE AND FAMILIES TOGETHER — YOUR SUPPORT MAKES OUR WORK POSSIBLE!

Together, we:

- **Provide permanent relationships.** Children need someone to rely on. We work to find individuals who are invested, reliable, and committed to the health and wellbeing of each child, whether that be a biological family member, foster parent, mentor, or adoptive parent.
- **Give young people a reason to believe they can succeed.** A poor choice, drug use, even a criminal conviction can lead a teen to feel he or she has no future. We provide a framework for rebuilding through education, relationships, and skill-building.
- **Keep children safe.** We provide safe, therapeutic care for youth who are homeless, in foster care, trafficked, in immigration detention, or in the justice system.
- **Keep families together.** Living at home is not always possible, or advisable, but it is always the most desirable option. We keep families together by providing in-home support that prevents family separation.

The stories in this book were written by youth, staff, and volunteers. We hope reading them helps you understand the impact your support has on so many lives. The work is difficult, but as you'll read in the following pages, the results are life-changing.

You made these stories happen.

*Thank you.*



Robert is a resident in our Harlem building, in one of the 12 studio apartments reserved for youth formerly in foster care or at risk of homelessness. In addition to being an advocate, Robert has just joined CV as a Peer Navigator, where he can continue his advocacy and guide youth who are in situations like he was.

**"WITHOUT THE SUPPORT THAT I RECEIVED AT CRITICAL TIMES IN MY LIFE, I'M NOT SURE I WOULD STAND WHERE I DO TODAY."**

My mom was an amazing woman with a big heart, but she was always sick and couldn't take care of me. I made some mistakes in my life, and ended up in the juvenile justice system and then foster care. While I was in care my mother passed away. I was lucky to have my CV coaches to lean on. When I was aging out of care I had no place to live, but my CV coaches helped me find an apartment. Even after I turned 21, they made me feel like I wasn't forgotten, like I was part of a community. When I was younger my mother inspired me to love art, music, and expressing myself. But making an impact on other people's lives is what I took most from her, and today I'm determined to give back.

That's why I chose to advocate on behalf of CV and the Fair Futures Campaign in Harlem this summer. We helped secure money for coaches for youth in foster care. Without my coaches and the support that I received at critical times in my life, I'm not sure I would stand where I do today. I'm living independently, saving money, and working. In fact, I just started a job where I can share my lived experience as a credible messenger at one of CV's programs that aims to keep kids from aging out of foster care and becoming homeless. I'm working hard to motivate my peers to become credible messengers as well. It's my chance to give back, be there for others, and effect positive change. I know that I can make a difference.



Michelle is a Program Facilitator for *Bravehearts*, a community of young adults who have experienced the child welfare, juvenile justice, or mental health systems. They share their lived experiences and learn from each other. The *Bravehearts* are a support network who aim to use their voices of survival and resiliency to bring healing to themselves and inspire others. Most importantly, they advocate for important changes to improve the systems they work with.

## "MOTHERHOOD HAS CHANGED ME - MY MOTIVATIONS AND GOALS ARE DIFFERENT NOW."

Growing up my mom tried her best, but had no support and was dealing with her own issues. She couldn't properly take care of me. At 15 years old I entered the foster care system.

Now that I am a young mother myself, I want to give my son a better life than I had. I go day by day trying to be the best mother I can be, but it's not easy. Everyone needs a support system, especially young mothers. It can be school, work, friends and family, daycare - having somebody who has been there before and can share their lived experience and give you resources is so important.

For me, *Bravehearts* at CV has been that support system, first as a participant and now as a staff member. The program allows me to use everything I've gone through as a teaching tool for other young people. We share our experiences, learn from each other, and advocate for necessary changes to the systems we have interacted with. My colleagues have been there for me like a true family, and they all have similar lived experiences so I feel comfortable sharing my struggles and hearing their advice. I even call them my forever family now, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to help other young adults and advocate for change.

Motherhood has changed me - my motivations and goals are different now. I get to see life through different eyes. I want my son to feel like his mom's always got him and will always be there for him. I want him to always feel that love and that connection so that he can just be free to be who he wants to be and follow his dreams. My mom didn't have that support system to help her through the tough times, but thankfully I do, and my son will be better off it.

## "NOW, I REALIZE THAT MY ARREST WAS ACTUALLY A BLESSING FOR ME."

As a teenager I got caught up with the wrong crowd. I had some anger issues and kept making bad choices and getting into trouble. When I got arrested the court gave me a choice: I could go to a residential facility, or meet with a social worker and try to get back to living at home with my mom.

When I met my social worker from CV, Marvin, we immediately clicked. The first thing we worked on was finding and maintaining positive activities for me, making sure I had things to do so I could stay off the streets and out of trouble. He also helped me learn to regulate my emotions and use different coping skills. Now I can have tough discussions and communicate with my mom so much better, and I'm not getting angry as easily. I have setbacks, but Marvin has helped me develop the tools I need to manage my anger on my own.

Now, I realize that my arrest was actually a blessing for me. With the right support I was able to stop making bad choices before I got into any serious legal trouble, which was a great thing. I'm motivated to apply for college and do something big with my life. I sketch, I design my own sneakers, and I even turned my closet into a studio so I can record in my room. I love being creative, it's a great outlet for me. It's my dream to be an animator or cartoonist; and now I am on the path to making that dream a reality.



Kevin was able to avoid residential care by working with one of CV's community-based social workers. We know that children often do best with family. Young adults like Kevin are still removed from the home regularly for minor offences. Thanks to CV's preventive work in the community, more youth are remaining with family and are achieving better outcomes.



Thaddeus is part of CV's Way to Success Program, which pairs youth with a coach to help them apply to or stay in school, get employed, find housing, and manage the difficulties that come with returning to the community after spending time in residential care. He never misses "Wrap It Up Saturdays", where youth in Way to Success share their experiences and work together to find solutions to challenges they are facing.

## "I GOT THIS."

I came to live at The Children's Village at 13 when I was working through some serious anger issues. I couldn't get along with anyone and living at home just wasn't working. At CV I learned some amazing coping skills and got to a really good place in my life, but as I was getting ready to return to the community I needed help to reach my goals.

I was always an A student so I knew I wanted to stay in school, but I wanted to work and start earning money too. I didn't have a clue how to figure out my next step. I met with my CV coaches and started to think about what I could do in life and how I could start to prepare for it.

I absolutely love sneakers, I've been talking about them and looking at them nonstop since I was 16. I told my coach Rosalia about my passion, and she helped me prepare for a group interview at a major shoe store in the Bronx while I finished my college applications. I went in feeling like "I got this". I found out I got the job the next day, and now I'm working at my dream job and I'm still making time for my college classes.

I never thought I would say this, but I'm even getting along with everyone in my family and things have been really positive. I love working at the shoe store but eventually I want to finish school and get my social work degree. I want to help people who were in my situation because I've seen how wrong it can go. If I didn't have a role model or support system like Rosalia, I'd still be making mistakes and getting caught up in distractions. I want to be that role model for other teens – they'll listen because I've been there and I know how hard it can be, but look at me now!



Gillian volunteers at Rose Cottage, a residential foster care cottage which houses CV's youngest boys. Spending time in a cottage is just one way that volunteers make a difference – they also work as mentors and tutors, help sort and distribute our in-kind donations, and plan new and creative activities and trips for our youth.

**"I THINK THAT BOND IS WHAT MEANS THE MOST TO ME AND THE BOYS."**

Four years ago, I met the boys in Rose Cottage and have been volunteering with them every month since. I thought it would be a great idea to introduce them to nutritious foods and simple cooking techniques. I was nervous that they wouldn't be interested, but the boys were really adventurous and curious about new foods! They inspired me to get creative, and we started to do blindfolded taste tests and games like "eat it or wear it." The boys laugh hysterically while we play those games, and it lets me know how much they have grown to trust me and the strong bonds that have formed between us. I think that bond is what means the most to me. It has come from visiting regularly and slowly building trust. Not all of the boys have a reliable person in their lives who is able to do that, and it makes me feel really good to try to be that for them.

Working with the boys has helped me become a more empathetic peer leader at my high school, and my leadership skills have improved with each visit. Since I began volunteering at CV I have started a high school volunteer club which pairs students with opportunities that match their interests, and pursued policy changes to improve and extend foster care services during an internship with Assemblyman Abinanti. In the fall, I will begin Communication studies at UPenn and hope to one day inspire more people to get involved with organizations like CV that can make a huge difference in the lives of each of these young boys.

I wouldn't be who I am today without knowing the boys in Rose – I'm so grateful for the opportunity to build relationships and bond with them.



## OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENTS

Our goal is to prepare children and families to reach their full potential. To that end, we track key indicators like education, work, housing, and returning to or remaining with family. The following are some of our recent outcomes:



**74%**

of youth in residential foster care returned to family and their communities



**98%**

of young adults in our shelters and transitional living programs found permanent homes



**415**

volunteers spent valuable time with our youth in residential care and in the community



**355**

young people received in-home services and avoided residential care



**94%**

of young adults in our aftercare and afterschool programs are continuing school and/or working



**310**

youth have been mentored by credible messengers



Our mission is to work in partnership with families to help society's most vulnerable children so that they become educationally proficient, economically productive, and socially responsible members of their communities. The Children's Village is accredited by the Council on Accreditation and the Better Business Bureau and was the gold prize winner of the New York Nonprofit Excellence Award.

Administrative Office

One Echo Hills  
Dobbs Ferry, NY 10522  
914-693-0600

Harlem Office

2139 Adam Clayton  
Powell Jr. Blvd.  
New York, NY 10027  
212-932-9009

Bronx Office

400 E. Fordham Road  
Bronx, NY 10468  
718-220-4700



@ChildrensVllg



@CV1851



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