

Our Stories are Your Stories



Anthology 2025
**the children's
village.**

Our Values

OPPORTUNITY

Everyone deserves the opportunity to reach their full potential.

FAMILY

Families belong together whenever possible.

DIVERSITY

We should celebrate diversity and its power to enrich us all.

SAFE SPACES

Housing should be safe, beautiful, and affordable.

MENTORSHIP

The presence of at least one caring, committed adult is a non-negotiable requirement for a child's success.

EDUCATION

A high-quality education empowers children to create a brighter future.

TRUST

We must partner with and trust our young people and families.



Thank you

Last year, your support enabled us to serve over 21,000 youth and families. Although the paths that bring a young person or family to connect with The Children's Village may differ, our mission remains unchanged - we help children reconnect to family, and if family is unable or unwilling to reunite, we strive to create a new family.

Thanks to friends like you, we are able to provide:

- Family reunification and support.
- Community and school-based programs.
- Support for youth impacted by the justice system.
- Trafficking and homelessness prevention.
- Life coaching and long-term support.
- Homes in desirable neighborhoods that are beautiful, safe, and affordable.

The stories in this book were created by young people and staff, and we hope they offer insight into the profound impact your support has on so many lives. As you read through the following pages, you'll discover life-changing outcomes and be inspired by the remarkable individuals we are privileged to know.

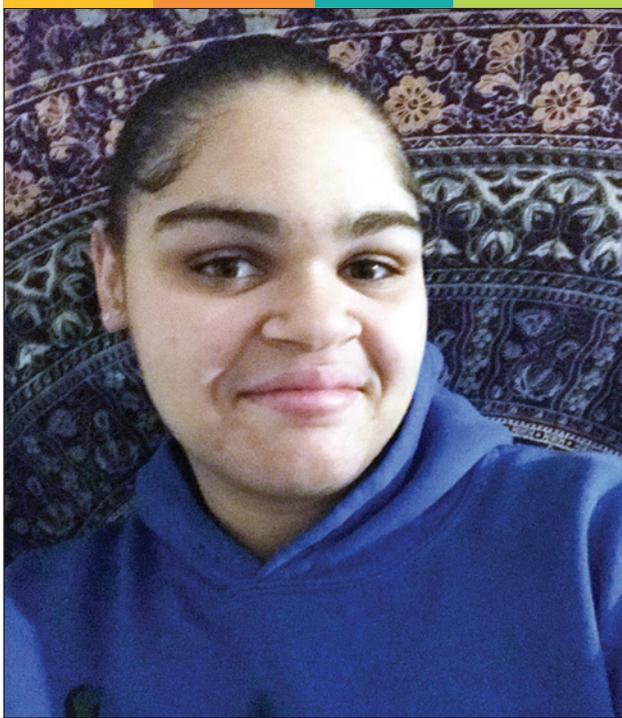
You made these stories happen. Thank you!

Sonjaia

"I believe I can make a positive impact by offering the support that I once needed."

I grew up in a challenging environment in New York, living with my mother, her boyfriend, and my siblings. Sometimes, we didn't have basic necessities like running water. My mom struggled with addiction, and I often took on the responsibility of caring for my siblings. It was tough, especially with nine kids in the house, my mom being unpredictable and at times aggressive, and hardships due to my mother's boyfriend.

One day, when I was visiting my father, my mom didn't show up to take me home. Over time, the court granted my father custody, and at the age of eight, I moved in with him and my stepmom. Although living with my dad and stepmom was an improvement, I was still carrying a lot of emotional weight. I didn't feel like the same person they saw during visitations,



and I began acting out. That's when, at age 13, I became involved with the Safe Harbor program.

Being part of the Safe Harbor program was a turning point for me. Through the program, I was able to talk about my experiences and trauma, and I received support that helped me navigate my challenges. The team at Safe Harbor made a huge difference, offering transportation, food, and emotional support. My therapist helped me understand what I had gone through, and art therapy taught me valuable coping skills. Now at 18, I have graduated from high school and enrolled in community college.

My experiences with Safe Harbor have inspired me to pursue a career where I can help teens and families. I want to be a social worker who truly understands the struggles that children face. Having lived through trauma, I want to offer the support I once needed, and I believe I can make a positive impact.

As I look ahead to my future, I know there will still be challenges, but I feel confident that whatever my next steps are, they'll be a positive and fulfilling journey.

Sonjaia credits her progress to the therapists in the Safe Harbor Program. The Safe Harbor Program provides therapy to help youth who have been or are at high risk of being trafficked or sexually exploited gain the confidence and courage to return safely to their families.

Mr. Glasby

"I'm living proof that change can happen."

I've spent the past 13 years mentoring young people, and the best part of my work is seeing its lasting impact. Nothing feels better than running into a former mentee and hearing they still remember the lessons we shared.

As a Program Coordinator at The Children's Village, I oversee mentorship for court-involved youth. Each year, we guide 6 to 16 young people through a six-month program designed to provide real skills, not just a safe space.

As a teen, I was incarcerated and assigned to a CV mentorship program as part of my probation. The program, focused on education, work, and community support, helped me build a plan. My mentor—a successful African American man who had also been incarcerated—showed me that a different path was possible. I often wish I'd had that guidance earlier, and now I strive to be that mentor for others. As Maya Angelou said, "When you know better, you do better."

One of our recent participants is proof of that. When he joined the program in early 2024, he was surrounded by negative

influences and at risk of being held back in school. But through the program, his grades got better, and he made the choice to distance himself from these influences while working on self-improvement. His dedication paid off. By the summer, he had graduated, had his court case dismissed, completed our financial literacy workshop with perfect attendance, and even applied for a summer job on his own.

Our approach is simple: meet young people where they are. That means understanding their challenges and breaking down barriers, whether through relatable conversations or real-life skill-building. My favorite activities include current events discussions and Preparing Youth for Adulthood (PYA) workshops, where we teach essentials like hygiene, social cues, and professional skills.

Mentorship has also shaped who I am as a father and motivated me to continue my education, recently earning my second master's degree. I want my mentees to see that no matter where they start, success is possible. I'm living proof that change can happen, and through this program, I hope to help others see that in themselves.

ICM Plus, which oversees mentorship for court-involved youth, uses a curriculum-based, group mentoring approach. The program empowers young people to develop problem-solving and social skills, with a focus on fostering emotional regulation, conflict resolution, and healthy relationships, supporting youth in achieving positive educational, employment, and personal outcomes.



Jessica

“Ever since I was 13, I’ve wanted to adopt.”

As the new year begins, I’m excited to celebrate a life-changing milestone: the finalization of my adoption of Sarah. I first met Sarah in 2019, when she was 10 years old and had already faced unimaginable loss and trauma. Sarah was part of The Wendy’s Wonderful Kids (WWK) Program, a child-focused recruitment model that helps find adoptive families for children in foster care. WWK is one of the funders for The Children’s Village Family Finding program.

I had the privilege of being Sarah’s therapist while she was placed at Andrus, a nonprofit dedicated to providing mental health care for youth. By the time I started working with Sarah, she had already lost her adoptive mother, father, and brother. Despite everything, she longed for a permanent family, and I

felt a deep connection to her.

I’ve known since I was 13 that I wanted to adopt. My dad, who wasn’t my biological father, provided me with the love and stability I needed, and I wanted to give that same gift to someone else. After working with Sarah for over a year, I contacted The Children’s Village and told them, “I’m ready

to move forward.” I left my job at Andrus and began making plans. Since I wasn’t working for a child welfare agency anymore, I started the adoption process about a year later.

In February 2023, Sarah moved in with me, and over the past few years, I’ve learned so much. I’m thrilled that the adoption process is nearly complete. Sarah is now 15, and she continues to grow and thrive. She’s active in school and involved in the Girls Leadership Council. She loves playing basketball, working out, and watching TV, and her dream is to become a doctor.

Though she still faces challenges, we work through them together. I remind her often, “You can be scared and still be brave. You can do it.” She recently attended an event called Black Doctors in White Coats and continues to stay focused on her goals. I’m incredibly proud of how far she’s come, and I’m excited for the bright future ahead for both of us.

The Children’s Village Family Finding Team works to find long lost family and build or maintain a family support network for all youth who are disconnected or at risk of alienation and lifelong estrangement, due to placement outside of their home and community. Since its inception, CV’s Family Finding program has served hundreds of young people throughout the NYC area.



Justin

*“I refused to let my past define me,
and that dedication paid off.”*

At nine years old, I entered residential treatment at The Children's Village. Over the years, I moved between foster homes and residential placements, facing many challenges. My cousin took me in for a few years, but when that didn't work out, I was placed with a CV foster family in the Bronx. From there, I moved through several homes, each experience shaping my resilience and determination.

From 18 to 21 I had a really stable foster home. During that time, I focused on my future, determined to create a better life for myself. At 21, I reached a major milestone—I moved into my very own apartment. The journey wasn't easy, but I stayed committed to my goals. I refused to let my past define me, and that dedication paid off.

I wanted to have my own space and be independent. I got a glimpse of where I wanted to live through a peer at CV. After visiting them, I knew it was where I wanted to be. With help from my CV WAY coach and CV college advisor, I gathered



the necessary information and set up a meeting about housing options. My coach supported me during a Zoom call with building management, and the meeting went so well that I secured my new home. Moving into my own place felt natural. The staff even helped me move in, showing their genuine care beyond just doing a job.

Throughout my time in care, I had staff who truly supported me. They encouraged me to participate in programs, guided me when I needed direction, and helped me develop skills I didn't know I had.

My advice to others in similar situations is to stand your ground and advocate for yourself. Life is like a train—I'm the conductor, and my team is the rest of the cars. If one car goes off track, it affects the whole journey. You have to make sure your train runs smoothly because no one else will advocate for you as strongly as you can.

Now, I'm focused on my next steps—returning to school and pursuing my dream of a career in music. I want to participate in the Garden of Dreams Talent Show and showcase my talents as a rapper. My journey has been tough, but resilience and self-advocacy have brought me this far, and I'm excited for what's ahead.

Justin is part of our WAY Home program, which employs mentors, or “WAY coaches,” to support youth transitioning out of foster care to independent living. WAY Home participants work toward meeting their short- and long-term goals, while WAY coaches assist them in overcoming challenges and solving problems.

Mr. Enders

“My advice to young people is always to be patient with yourself and know you are a survivor.”

In April 2022, I applied for a position at one of CV's residential facilities, which provides a safe haven dedicated to helping young women who are survivors of trafficking. I was excited about the opportunity to work with these youth and make a positive impact. Once I joined the team, I was deeply inspired by the program's mission and its empowering, therapeutic approach. The program teaches the youth that they should never be ashamed or punished for their past experiences.

Now, as an Assistant Supervisor, my focus is on helping these young women discover their true selves. Many of them come from abusive backgrounds where they were denied the chance to express themselves. As a result, I emphasize the importance of effective communication, particularly assertive

communication, so they can advocate for themselves and establish healthy boundaries. It's incredibly empowering for them to realize that their voices matter—especially after having been silenced in the past.

In my role, I also lead individual sessions, and I've witnessed remarkable growth in the young people I work with. One young woman, who came to us from a juvenile detention center, was initially quiet and reserved. However, over time, she gained confidence and achieved everything she set out to do—she got her permit, attended prom, and built meaningful friendships. By the time she left, she was preparing for college and had fully embraced the skills she had learned.

“Mr. Enders helped me learn how to control my anger by working with me so I wouldn't get into trouble. He always reminded me to stay positive and encouraged me to work hard to achieve my goals,” said a youth in care.

As I work with these young people, I always remind them to be patient with themselves. Mistakes are a part of the learning process, and it's crucial to remember that everyone has their own survival mechanisms.

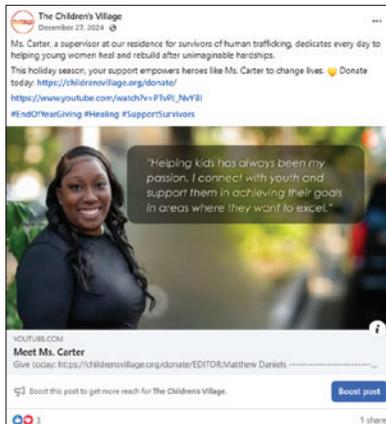
I'm truly humbled by the work I do, and I take immense pride in knowing I may be making a difference in the lives of these young women. It's incredibly rewarding.

Mr. Enders is part of the program staff that works with teens in The Safe Harbor Program. The program provides therapy with the goal of helping teens who have been or are at high risk of being trafficked or sexually exploited gain the confidence and courage to return safely to their families and communities.



Connect with Us

Follow us on Social Media and continue to see more stories about the youth and families we serve. And visit our website to learn more about upcoming events and ways to get involved.





www.childrensvillage.org

Our Mission

The Children's Village is committed to the well-being of children, teens, and families by advocating for, strengthening, and reuniting families; building community partnerships; creating innovating programs; and connecting people to resources that focus on equity, basic needs, and human rights.

