

Love what they do
they give what you
may not have that a live
it can be good at some
point and some it could
not what u think and
live by day. by day



VOICES FOR change

THE CREATIVE VISION OF VIRGINIA'S FOSTER YOUTH



THE CREATIVE VISION OF VIRGINIA'S FOSTER YOUTH

VOICES FOR change



THE
CREATIVE VISION
OF VIRGINIA'S
FOSTER YOUTH

VOICES FOR change

SPONSORED BY

VIRGINIA POVERTY LAW CENTER
VOICES FOR VIRGINIA'S CHILDREN
FACES OF VIRGINIA'S FAMILIES
ART 180



Main Sponsors

Virginia Poverty Law Center (VPLC) is a not-for-profit organization concentrating in the areas of law that affect low-income families. Established in 1978 to advocate on behalf of low-income Virginians on poverty issues of state-wide importance, VPLC is the only state-wide organization providing training to local legal aid program staff, private bar attorneys, and low-income clients, relating exclusively to the legal rights of Virginia's poor.

For more information, visit www.vlpc.org

Voices for Virginia's Children is a statewide, non-profit, non-partisan awareness and advocacy organization that builds support for public policies to improve the lives of children. A recognized leader in child advocacy, Voices mobilizes support for initiatives by conducting policy research, building coalitions, and helping people articulate their support for children.

For more information visit www.vakids.org

FACES of Virginia Families is a non-profit, membership-driven Association offering information, support and resources for foster, adoptive and kinship families.

For more information visit www.facesofvirginia.org

ART 180, a Richmond-based non-profit organization, creates and provides art-related programs to young people living in challenging circumstances, encouraging personal and community change through self-expression.

For more information visit www.art180.org

I know what it's like to want. There were days that we didn't have much to eat, clean clothes or electricity. We just had the clothes on our backs; but still I had hope. — BRITTANY, AGE 14, *VOICES FOR CHANGE*

A Letter from the First Lady of Virginia

As of this writing, nearly 8,000 of Virginia's children and youth are in foster care. More than half of those youth are eleven years of age or older, and far too many of them live in group homes and other facilities without any connection to a permanent family. Hundreds of them face the daunting prospect of "aging out" of the system, leaving state care when they reach adulthood without a place to call home.

Despite these dismal statistics, the young people in foster care that I have met expressed optimism and confidence in their futures. Like the youth whose works have been captured in this book, they impressed me with their thoughtful suggestions on how to improve their own lives and those of other foster youth in Virginia. The artwork and photographs and writings on the following pages represent not only the talents of these youth but also their ideas for improving the system that cares for so many of Virginia's children. Looking behind the pieces, we can see what worked and how the system failed from their perspectives.

The "Voices for Change" project invited youth in foster care between the ages of twelve and twenty-one to submit original artwork, photographs and writing that depicted their experiences in Virginia's foster care system. The stories the youth tell through their submissions highlight how even the brightest and most determined young person must constantly fear failure. In spite of the significant improvements we are making to Virginia's child welfare system, there is much, much more work to be done.

I invite you to listen to what the youth themselves say about the system that is raising them. Study the artwork and photographs on the following pages and carefully read their words. I hope that what you find in this book will encourage you to seek out a dialogue about changing our foster care system with the many wonderful young people who are being raised in it.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Anne Holton'.

Anne Holton
First Lady of Virginia
Chair, *Voices for Change* Steering Committee

Mindy · Age 13 · Fredericksburg, VA

WHAT HAPPENED

Thursdays are the worst days of my life. Each Thursday reminds me of that awful Thursday when I was taken away from my parents. Each Thursday my Mom and Dad can visit me, but Dad has come only once and Mom has not come for over a month.

Because I had NO clean clothes, I had not attended school. Now there were two ladies at the door. I heard a knock. One of the ladies said, “open the door.” An hour later I did open the door, wondering what would happen. The ladies entered, asked questions and took pictures of the motel room. They told me where I was going and to get my favorite belongings. Then I hopped in the car and we left. My head was spinning. There was too much to process. Where was I going? What was going to happen to me? How would I ever overcome this? Why was I being taken away?

When we arrived at the social services office, we went to the top floor and I waited. I felt as if I were there for a lifetime but it was probably only a few minutes. As I waited, all I could think was that “mom and dad would be worried about me.” Did they even know that I was gone?

Then social workers brought pizza and told me to eat. I couldn’t eat. I was just too worried! Then I met these wonderful people – Miss Peg and Mr. Kevin. I was so nervous about meeting them! It didn’t take long to feel comfortable with them. Miss Peg and I went to Target to get my some clothes for school. Then we had a great super – a family dinner! It was so funny when we washed and dried dishes. I didn’t know where anything went so I put them wherever. Before I went to bed that night I hoped that I would wake up from this bad dream!

Unfortunately that did not happen. I woke up, got ready for school and Mr. Kevin took me to Post Oak Middle, which was far away from their house. That day I could not think. My mind was on overload. What was going to happen to

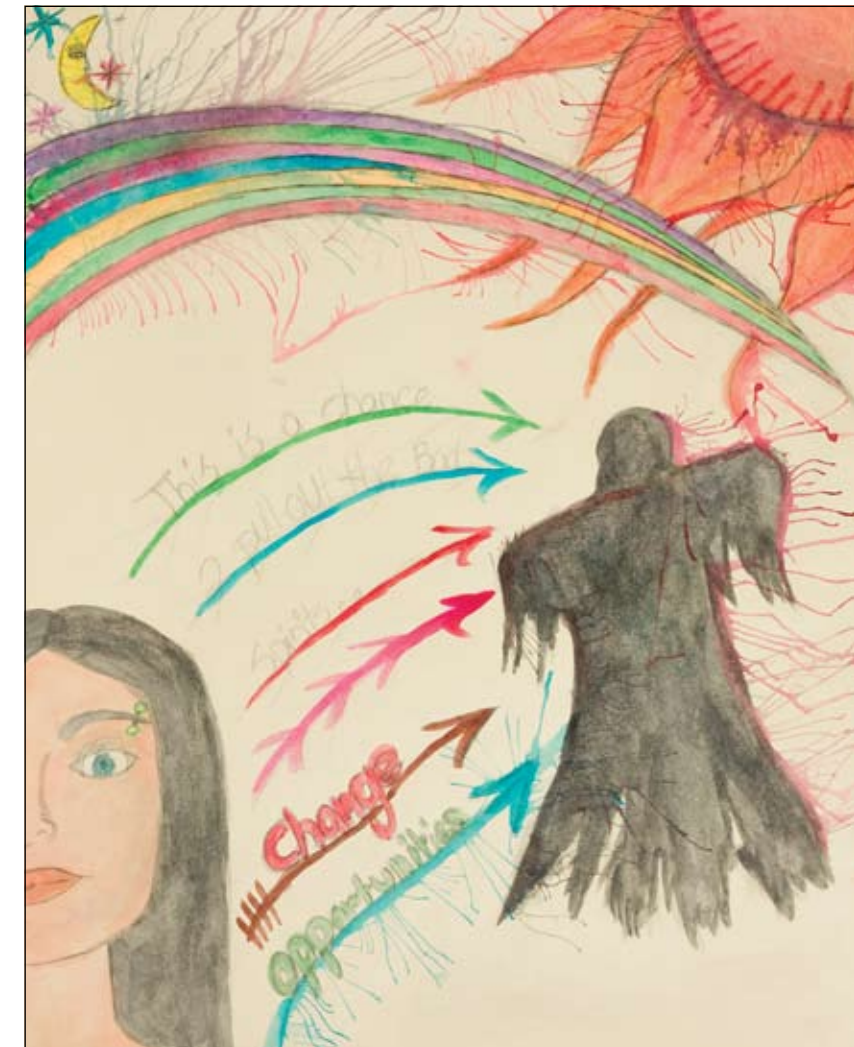
me? Where was my Mom and Dad? Would I go straight home or go back to Miss Peg and Mr. Kevin’s house?

I have now been in foster care for about four months! In the meantime, I found out that my Dad spent six weeks in jail, but my Mom was not put in jail because she had no prior convictions. She got out on her own recognizance. My parents have missed me greatly. It seemed like the end of the world.

Now since I’ve been in a foster home I have done many things that I thought was never possible. I have given my soul to the Lord. When I came into the system I’ll have to be honest that I thought that the Lord was against me. Yet now, I see he had a plan to give me the best of childhoods. I have a great foster mom, who wants the best for me and a terrific foster father, who puts a smile on peoples faces! My foster sisters, Maria and Emily, are the best at talking to me when something’s wrong! I’ve always wanted a brother and now I have River, and I can trust him with anything. My new family has shown me a different way of living!

Many people have been there for me since I entered foster care. Kelly, my social worker, lets me get things off my chest! Then there is Anne, my CASA worker and best friend. She listens and gives good advice, much like my grandmother Linda, who wants the best for me also. My grandmother has helped me through all of my bad times. She loves me deeply and forever.

So what has this taught me? I am loved by many people. Strangers have stepped up to give me experiences that I would never have had. People, in this world, care about strangers and practice love. For example, a lady is providing private music lessons for me; I have attended an environmental camp. My foster care experience is making me strong. I now know that I can face any challenge and I will be a help to others as people have helped me.



Brittany · Age 16 · Virginia

CHANGE THE BAD SPIRITS

Maysheka · Age 15 · Doswell, VA

OVERCOMETH

I overcame my fear; I have become better in this life that God gave to me

“I do thank him”

Because I survived the pain of rape and abuse, beatings, scars so deep, my mind clueless ... so

You see it feels like the hurt travels through me as a tunnel of disasters

Yet I walk thru like I walked out of hell!

I reached up and out to heaven ...

I tell you I felt like I was walking through hell and back from the

Devil's brutal attack.

Days of waking up crying out, my body hurts from use and abuse.

Yeah, I too have made some mistakes but

Through it all I have overcome ... Lord I have overcometh!

I will not allow anyone to take my joy! I will not keep running and running

I have been running from you too long, “still I overcometh”

I have overcometh my fear!



Mikey · Age 13 · Virginia

THE FAMILY FLOWER

This flower represents my family because my family gets bigger when kids come. Foster care is the best thing that ever happened to me because I got adopted and I know I have a family who cares.

Corina · Age 15 · Lynchburg, VA

MY STORY

My name is Corina. I live in Lynchburg Virginia at the Presbyterian Home. I have been in the system since I was 12 years old, and I will stay in the system until I am 18. I am writing this paper to express my true feelings and experiences about the system to someone who will listen. I want people to please not judge me for my past. I have changed and I am better because of it. This is my story.

When I was placed in the system I was a lost, angry, sad girl with no hopes or goals. My entire life has been extremely hard but I have always found ways to deal with my problems. I was a normal, happy child until my sister died when I was eight years old. In one year my mom and dad got divorced, we moved four hours away, and my mom started drinking. Her drinking got worse as the months turned to years and I felt completely abandoned. I felt like I had to take care of her like an adult but I just wanted to be a kid. My mom was still my mom but she was running from her pain with my sister's death and I didn't realize it. My little brother and I would just cry because we felt alone. My family and I weren't getting along to say the least and my behavior began to spiral out of control. I ran away and started using drugs. I got locked up twice before I got removed from my house. My dad wouldn't take me because he said he couldn't handle me, so I was placed in DSS custody in February of 2005.

My first placement was in a foster home. I tried to adjust to such a different environment but at the time I was so angry that I didn't care. They were complete strangers. I didn't do well in my first placement because I wanted to go home so bad. I ended up getting kicked out of my foster home after a few weeks because I just wouldn't comply with my foster parent's rules. I missed my family and I felt like an outcast in their family. I hid all of my pain under the smile on my face but eventually I couldn't hide it anymore. At school one day my social worker showed up with two cops and told me I was being moved to a group home in Salem.

My second placement was a short stay too. I wasn't used to strangers telling me what I could and couldn't do. To be honest I had no respect for anyone. I acted out constantly. I thought I would eventually get my way and go home, but that blew up in my face. I got into several fights and I ended up getting sent to a strict Wilderness program. Things just got worse and worse for me. I had been moved three times in two months.

I was placed in WOODS that April. Woods was an eight month program however I ended up staying 15 months due to my behavior. I was jumped by three girls when I first got there. That is when I realized that I would have to fight and protect myself by myself. During my stay at Woods I really changed. I hated it there but Woods taught me respect and to accept responsibility for my actions when I was wrong. My social worker gave me support and my family was hoping for the best. My mom and I worked on our relationship and things began to change. I was maturing and when I graduated from there I actually felt like I had did something good. I started really thinking about my life and what I wanted to accomplish. There was only one problem ... my mom was still drinking and I no idea what was really going on at home.

I went home and the first night I was there my mom passed out in the floor in the kitchen right in front of me. I picked her up and carried her to her room. At that moment I knew I wasn't going to last there long. I had just got home and it didn't even matter. I broke out in tears, packed my things and I left a few days later.

We went to court and I ended being told that I would never be able to live at home again. My mom cried so hard because everything I had worked for went down the drain. I then was placed here at the Presbyterian home. Overall I had been doing well here these past two years. I got into some trouble but not like before. I definitely had my own boundaries. I was accepting that this place was my new home and I adjusted to the rules and even the things that I hated about it. My mother and I hadn't talked in a long time but she stopped drinking and we began writing letters. I had to spend Christmas alone and it hurt so badly. I missed my little brother and I realized how fast he was growing up. He had just turned 14. Being in a group home alone around the holidays didn't make me feel great about my life. I just wanted to be a normal kid and to be able to hang out with my friends and not worry about where I am going to live or who will be telling what to do next. I wondered what it was like to have a normal life.

I have grown
like a rose from
concrete

Then the worst thing that could ever happen actually did. My little brother died this past January due to Suicide. The asthma medication he was taking caused him to have suicidal thoughts and mood swings. I have had an extremely hard time dealing with it. I hold on because I have to. Giving up for me is not an option. My entire family is closer now but I don't think I will ever understand why this had to happen to me and my family. My mother and I have clung on to each other and she had been sober for almost one year. My father and I talk almost everyday. I have grown stronger from all of the hurtful experiences I have been through and I know I am a survivor.

Now to the point of all this, the system has both hurt me and helped me. I have grown like a rose from concrete. No one ever expected me to succeed or to move forward but I have. I am now a junior in High School and I am extremely independent. I am getting a job and I hope to go to independent living soon. I want to go to college and help kids who have been through some of the same things I have. I haven't gave up because I want to prove to everyone I can do it. I am doing this for my family and for my little brother. I would never had made it through all of this without my social worker. My social worker has loved me like her own child and wanted the best for me. She never gave up on me even when I gave up on myself and I respect her for that. I wish the system gave more freedom to certain individuals. I wish people didn't automatically assume that we're bad kids because we're in the system but other than that the system has given me a second chance.

Wesley · Age 14 · Richmond, VA

MY FAMILY

While I sit and ponder,
Thinking why it's so cold,
I feel a need to wonder,
Why I should be bold.

I have my people behind me,
Taking just one step at a time,
Helping me keep up with my progress, just so I can see,
My foster brothers, friends, and family all in my line.

Being new was hard, like a rocky road,
The consequence of being super shy.
Now I'm older and everything unfolds,
Now I have to put on my tie.

Thanks to some people here,
People at UMFS, my place,
The helped me when I shed my only tear,
I have to leave them with a smiling grace.

I had to commence and get up on stage,
And say my final goodbye.
They are finally letting me leave this cage,
Thanks to all my friends here, they'll see me cry.

So I have to say one more thing,
Thank you for all you did for me!



Sean · Age 12 · Richmond, VA

VOICES FOR CHANGE

I've always wanted to have and show peace. I am one of the horses and the other is my dream. Whenever I see my dream I will look hard into the future and follow.



Jacqueline · Age 15 · Midlothian, VA

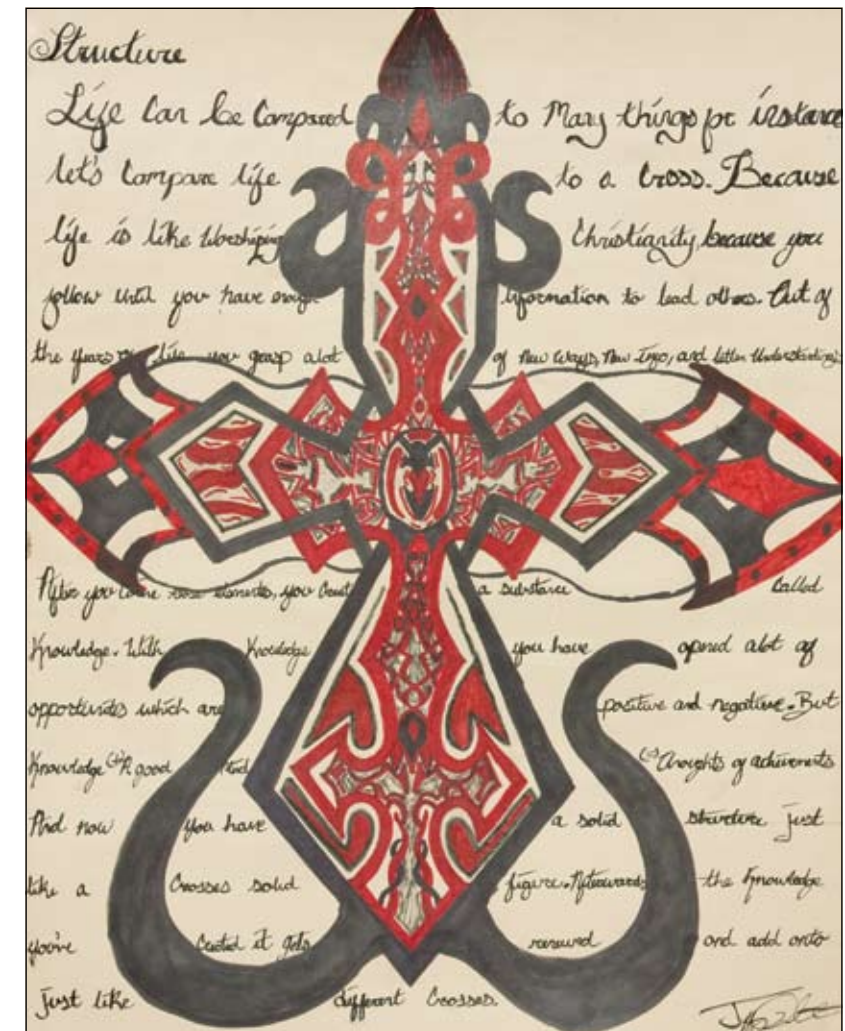
THE STORY OF MY LIFE!

My name is Jacqueline and I am 15 years old. I'm also currently a foster child. All my life I have been abused and hurt physically, emotionally, and verbally. I thought that the abuse would never come to an end but I guess I was wrong. Someone special walked into my life and made a difference. And her name is Caroline. She had me realize that you don't have to beat your child to show them that you love them. She also taught me to follow my hopes and dreams. One of my hopes is to grow up in Virginia's foster care so that I can be successful. But after all this time being in Virginia's foster care I'm proud to say that IT ROCKS!

VIRGINIA'S FOSTER CARE ROCKS!

Life is hard as we all might say because we all go through a lot. Even though we might want to give up we have to use what we were taught. Just know that when things get tough it's not the end cause there's better places out in the world. Like take Virginia's foster care for instance, ready to take any special boy or girl. There will be many people that will make a difference in your life and stick by you day and night and when you're mad or sad they'll tell you that everything's going to be alright. Make no second thought about joining Virginia's foster care take time and look at the clock time will never run out because ...

VIRGINIA'S FOSTER CARE ROCKS!



Jeffrey · Age 16 · Salem, VA

STRUCTURE

Daniel · Age 16 · Stafford, VA

FOSTER CARE

Foster Care is like a breath of fresh air
After life has dealt you a bad pair
Have faith in Foster Care.
Even life has ups and downs, but have
Patience, help is on the way might not be
Tomorrow, but certain one day.
Life may have a lot of despair, but there will always be Foster Care.
So put a smile on your face because you could be in a worse place.



Shante · Age 20 · Charlottesville, VA

A NEW CHAPTER TO AN OPEN DOOR

PHOTOGRAPHY
HONORABLE
MENTION

Tesha · Age 15 · Roanoke, VA

CUTE DEFINES ME

How can I be right when things go so wrong?
How can I be positive when everything is so negative?

Where do I fit in?

Could I get away with being “pretty?”
No, I’ve been through too much for that.
I’ve starting growing pimples from carrying so much weight on my back.

Maybe “hot” is a better way to describe me.
No, that would only irritate me because I would start breaking a sweat.

“Attractive?”
Probably, but I would spend a lot of time looking for someone that I can relate to.
Someone that I can build trust in.

I’ve got it – “cute.”
You don’t have to do lot to be cute and it is okay to have some crummy days.

I am cute...

Creative
Unique
Talented
Energized



Jasmine · Age 17 · Richmond, VA

AI AIKA

I feel like an angel chained down with ribbons of regret. Regret about losing my house, finding happiness in my life, blaming myself for my mom's drug problem. Dealing with Depression, Suicide, Isolation, Cutting, and Loneliness. I am crying because I want to be free from these things.

Christian · Age 16 · Lynchburg, VA

THE FAMILY THEY DIDN'T HAVE TO BE

In 1996 I was five and a half when I came to the foster family that brought me up as one of their own kids. Mrs. Janie of Boonesmill, VA took me in with open arms, and open hearts. This family hadn't taken a foster kid in years. When I first got there, Mrs. B said I would call her one of three things, "Janie, Mrs. B, or Grandma Janie." I chose to call her Grandma.

The next day I was introduced to I call my Aunt Dawn, Uncle Andy, and Cousin Kyle. Kyle was four at the time. To this day they are part of my life.

I stayed with grandma until I was eight years old. This was the year I went to live with a family that was looking to adopt. This family, who are now my Mom and Dad found out about me through my first cousin in grandma's family. Deidra worked in a doctor's office. My mother being a pharmaceutical rep called on this particular office. Deidra had a picture of me on her desk, that was when they were told about me. Two years later I was adopted.

In my opinion foster care works, you just have to let it work. I am thankful for the effort put into this program.

All of the foster parents, and future foster parents thank you, for everything you do. With God's help you can help a child in need for a home as my family did. I haven't lost contact with my family ever. They have stayed in my life, and will continue to be there. Thanks for everything you've done and may God bless you and all of your families.



Tyrell · Age 17 · Alexandria, VA

MY REFLECTION

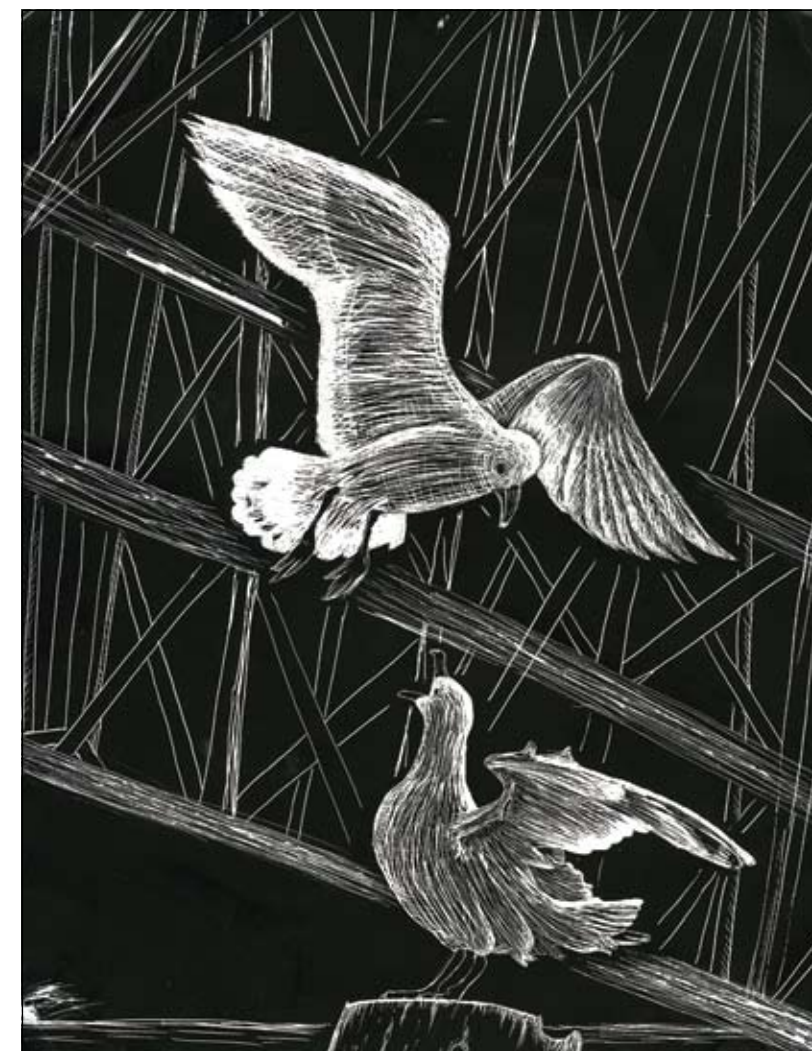
I took this photo at the Little River United Church of Christ in Annandale, Virginia when our group of foster kids was packing boxes for the soldiers serving in Iraq. On this day, we packed over 70 boxes for the soldiers serving in Iraq and I took many of the photos from this activity. It felt good being able to send boxes to the soldiers fighting for our country, and I feel good being a photographer for our group.

PHOTOGRAPHY
SECOND
PLACE

Qwneshina · Age 16 · Roanoke, VA

LOOK A LITTLE DEEPER

Next time I smile, look a little deeper.
Maybe you will find the little girl I hide inside.
She has been there for quite sometime.
Alone she cries, hoping someone will hear her.
These feelings of helplessness really scare her.
So listen very carefully, can you hear her cries?



Baron · Age 17 · Petersburg, VA

BIRD ON A FARM

Brandon · Age 17 · Chesterfield, VA

SOLD OUT

*I feel as if DSS has silenced my voice and [tried] changing me
into something I'm not.*

Brandon

I feel as if DSS has silenced my voice



Angelo · Age 13 · Fairfax, VA

LIFE

You have to work for what you want. You have to work hard; you can't just sit around, giving up on your dreams, acting like you have no purpose to be alive.
You have to get back, strive for your goal, and act like you have a purpose to be alive.
You have to do what ever it takes to succeed in your dream; to get further in your journey,

LIFE

You have a dream; every single human being has a dream.
You can't just give up on your dream that quickly; you have to never give up, never put yourself down.
Do want you want. It's your body, it's your dream, it's yours,

LIFE

God put you on this planet for a reason.
He put every single human being on this planet for a purpose; to thank him, to praise him.
Jesus Christ died for us, for us. He gave us life, purposes, dreams, what ever you want to call it.
This is life and you only get one chance, One... ONLY... One.
This is life; you have to work hard for your dreams, for your future.
This is life, and you have to live it. It's you, it's everyone.

It... Is...

LIFE



Latasha · Age 19 · Big Stone Gap, VA

ANYBODY CAN CHANGE WITH A LITTLE HELP!

This picture shows the changes that I have had by being in foster care. One side shows the time when I was at home and how I used to be evil, didn't care about nobody and how they felt and how I never got anybody never care about me. The other side shows how being in foster care has really opened my eyes and now I'm respectful, understanding.



Sycoya · Age 16 · Lynchburg, VA

GOT NERVE

YOU GOT NERVE
TO SAY ONE THING
THEN DO THE OTHER
YOU GOT NERVE
TO CALL ME A FRIEND
THEN PUT IT TO AN END
YOU GOT NERVE
TO BE A FRIEND TO MY FACE
THEN GET ON MY CASE
YOU GOT NERVE

I GOT NERVE
TO STILL LIKE YOU
THEN TO FIGHT YOU
I GOT NERVE
TO BE MYSELF
THEN TO BE SOMEWHERE ELSE
I GOT NERVE
TO CARE WHAT YOU THINK
THEN TO PUT IT IN INK
I GOT NERVE

to call me a friend
and then put it to an end
you got nerve



Tesha · Age 15 · Roanoke, VA

STILL REACHING OUT

This picture shows what it is like to be in foster care; often you love someone and want to be with them but you just can't seem to reach them. The snake in the picture represents foster care and how the system will not let you be with your family. Your "real family" has to go through a lot of obstacles to get you out of foster care.

Frances · Age 13 · Hanover, VA

WHY

When I was 9 yrs old my momma hit the door my happiness hit the floor
at 11 yrs my heart couldn't take no more I wasn't very sure what would
happen to me all I wanted was to be free, I wanted to grab a knife and
end someones life I got tired of how I felt and getting hit with that belt,
I felt like I was in war with the gun on my shoulder then all of a sudden
my feet wouldn't go any further, next thing I knew my heart start beating
fast then all of a sudden my grandma past I blinked now I am in Foster care,
then I said my life is unfair and why me, my life is like a never ending horror.
My life has been a tough fight and I don't see the light, some one cut me
some slack before I break my back is it because I am black
tell me what do I lack...?



Erika · Age 14 · Virginia Beach, VA

THE FLOWER

It is very good for kids and to protect them. I really like the foster parent and nice people.

Kendra · Age 14 · Portsmouth, VA

THE TRIALS OF FOSTER CARE

I have been in foster care for over two years.

I have lived in foster homes and group homes.

Now I live in a residential facility.

Sometimes it is so hard to be here I wish I were in a detention center.

Sometimes I had fun foster parents and did fun stuff.

Sometimes I was really sad and felt like things would never get better.

The card over my heart says, I have a broken heart but it will be mended.

Kendra

the card over my heart says,
I have a broken heart
but it will be mended

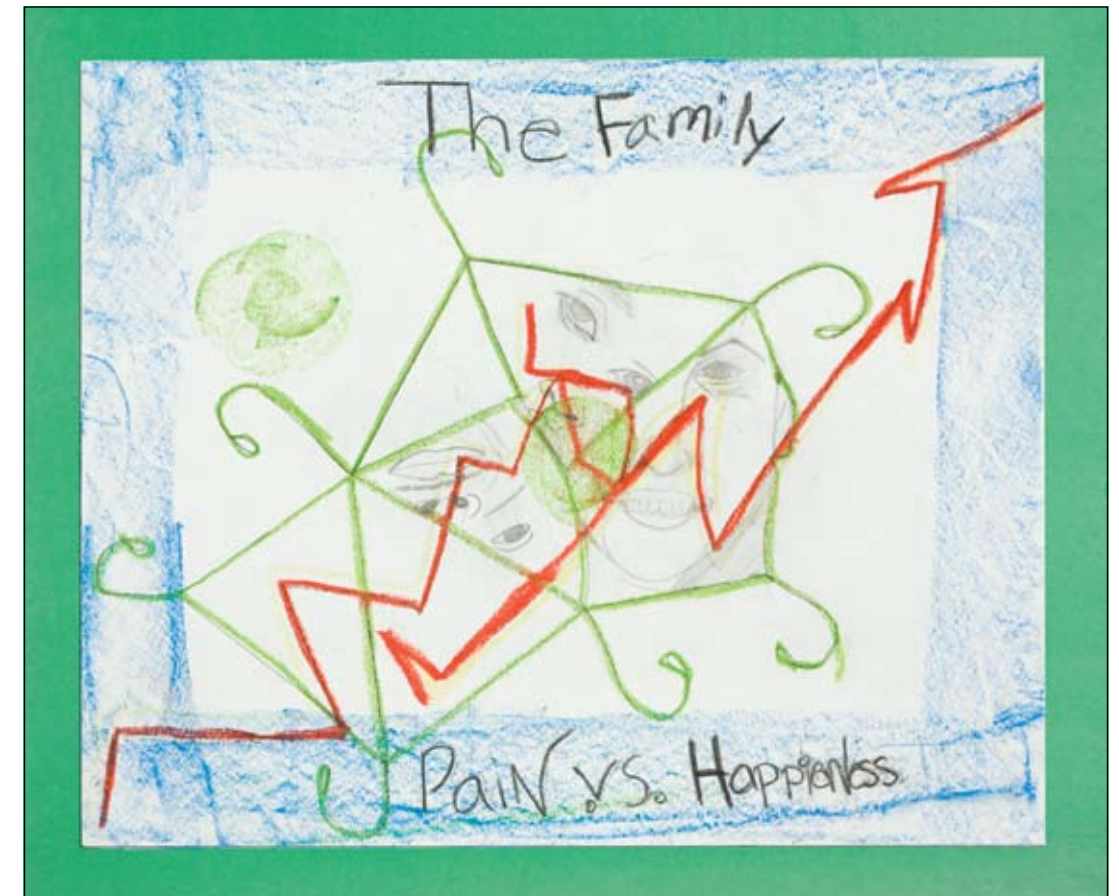


Shanell · Age 16 · Fredericksburg, VA

AGONEY

Misery was in her eyes,
Was all she had to hide;
The constant crying, misery was her mind.
It controlled her every move,
Withered her up to a fool;
But she flipped the script.
Turned her life around.
The world does not stop when your pain is still here.
Who could she follow?
Because she didn't want to lead,
But her heart and mind continued to bleed.
Misery took over her indeed.
The tears kept falling from her eyes,
She was more than what they treated her;
She felt like crap, but they couldn't see this.
She wasn't mad for no reason,
No one was pleasing.
Her life faded away each and every day,
Misery took over what she had to say.
She died slowly, but when life got its way,
She died right away.
All that was left was her bones and flesh,
She could not wake up from all this mess.

She could not rest,
So why stay on this road when nothing's at the end.
Still deep within, lays misery.
They took her life away,
They think she is going crazy because they made me.
She didn't want to be this way,
But she had no choice.
Why couldn't her life be like the other sixteen year old
girls she knew?
But yet her life was so blue.
She could not take it anymore,
For misery was the one she adored.
Her soul was so hurt and bruised,
For misery was the only thing her heart used.
She was so confused,
She didn't know what to choose; Right or Wrong
Because misery had her all along.
The grass got greener on the other side,
As she began to come back alive.
She finally started realizing that life did have sunshine,
Happiness had moved back in.
She did not have to pretend anymore.
Because happiness was the one that she now adored.



Shanice · Age 16 · Fairfax, VA

THE FAMILY

My picture is about the pain and happiness that I've been through; the red line is the pain. The blue line is happiness, and the green line is the power. The faces are of a family who has been showed what the power, anger, and happiness of a child can do.

Jasmine · Age 17 · Richmond, VA

FALLEN FLOWERS

Like a fallen angel, you fell from the sky
A Brand new light, a flower blooming in the darkness
Indigo Tears I have shed for you, like Jupiter Jazz on a Sunday morning
Your blue grey eyes pull me in, like the crashing tides on the distant seashore
You, sleeping against the backdrop of space
A red crimson rose dances playfully in the wind,
Full only of a Forbidden Love.
Always find myself hidden beneath your wings of Fate
Give to me some more of your Love, give to me some more of your strength.
Blue grey eyes pulls me in, like the crashing tides on the distant seashore.
Time itself cannot be rewind, for you alone ransomed my heart.
Entrust to me your eternal smile
Smile as always, as if nothing was wrong,
For you only I open my heart to
Hands outstretched to always welcome you; wanna make you feel at home.
Let me be your outlet of HOPE, let me be your object of attention
No objections, let me hear it from your lips; say you "LOVE ME" with all your heart.
There's NO ONE in this WORLD I adore AS MUCH AS YOU!
Let me be your object of affection, let there be a difference between LOVE AND DESIRE;
And let us be DRAWN TOGETHER FAITHFULLY to one another
Be MINE FOREVER as you have always KNOWN.
Be my LAST and quicken my HEART
FOR ALWAYS AND FOREVER, unchanging in the tides of the year ...
Like a fallen ANGEL, you fell from the sky
A BRAND NEW LIGHT, A FLOWER BLOOMING IN THE DARKNESS
INDIGO TEARS I have shed for YOU, like Jupiter Jazz on a SUNDAY MORNING.



Candace · Age 14 · Richmond, VA

UNTITLED

My painting represents the start of my journey through foster care. Foster care is a process for people who have had struggle in their life and need to get better. The flowers represent hope for the children in foster care.

Shay · Age 16 · Lynchburg, VA

MOTHER'S BIRTH

She thinks about herself
One person to please
But now with two souls
There's a second piece
Two heartbeats combined with one
A beautiful girl, a beautiful son
She lies down, she gives birth
An angel comes, a boy on earth
A love fills her heart that wasn't there
He's got her eye, he's got her hair
Her pain is gone it disappeared
With this gift there is no fear
She is blessed with him
He's blessed with her
So much love
Just one birth...



Lorenzo · Age 15 · Fairfax, VA

TWO DUCKS ON A LAKE

The two geese represent the way I see my life; the one in the shadows represents all the tough times I've seen. The other one represents the good changes in my life. Change comes, but ever so slowly.

Karen · Age 17 · Arlington, VA

VISITATION

Once every two months I wake up Sunday mornings at 11:00. I get up, shower, dress, and then read till 11:45, the time we leave. Sitting in the Relay, staring straight ahead, the ride seems endless. At approximately 12:00 p.m. we (Jenny and I) arrive at my birth mother's apartment. We wave goodbye to Isabel and head into mom's warm, safe and relaxing home. With a passion, love and excitement, we hug our mother. We stay from 12:00 till 6:00, and boy does time go by fast. The clink-clank of the pots and pans, the mix of the foods and drinks are the only sounds in the house. All we do is cook, eat, cook and eat. Jenny and I, sitting on the comfy couch, joke about how cool it would be if we could come and live here. Forgetting our past, and forgiving her, after

all, she is our mother. I stir the arroz con leche and sample the tamales and pollo, in a pink apron, making sure they all taste great. I learn how to make spaghetti, getting the spaghetti noodles and sauce, boiling the water then adding the noodle and heating the sauce, finally mixing the sauce and spaghetti together, I feel hungry. Our cousins come, our aunts come, and some times my niece comes with her mother and our older sister. With my niece I play, I read to her, and I watch her sleep. News travels so fast in our family, so hearing about one of our cousins running for office shocks me. To run for office is challenging. I think. Her approach on a difficult job I do appreciate. Her dedication, spirit and courage are amazing.

Jenny and I, sitting on the comfy couch,
joke about how cool it would be if we
could come and live here

going to the cold-hearted house seems
my most difficult task to complete

Throughout the house, my relatives bring the memories of life with them and how easy it is to just relax and not be told to do something. In her kitchen, mom looks like me. Only she is lighter, with curly dark brown hair and loving brown eyes. I cook with her, talk to her, and watch her stir the rice. Talking only in Spanish with me, she knows I have forgotten most of my language, and she tells me, "Never forget the language that raised you and nurtured you." I take classes and talk to her only in Spanish because she is the one I lived with for eleven years and I must graduate high school and college for her. When 6:00 come by we see Isabel. Her advance to the house I detest. Breaking our loving family spell apart and creating the picture of reality. When she come into the house – walking quickly, looking at us, taking note of the food – I feel like she is judging my mom and her food. She rudely, hastily, and without emotions, she tells us it is time to leave. She loads the food and off we go, to the cold, silent, watchful, eye of our "home sweet home." All the time my desire to smack her and embrace her, to shake her yet thank her, to shout at her yet to smile at her comes to a surprise

to me. Why? Never me. Again, sitting in the Relay seems a lot shorter. Isabel says something. What? Can't hear her. She says my mom has cleaned her act, but still drinks. Not my mother. She stopped drinking a long time ago. Listening to her is impossible. Going to the cold-hearted house seems my most difficult task to complete. Again. To hear that your mom might still drink feels out of this world. Fake. Not believable. Inside, my heart thumps, and pounds in my chest, my stomach is now upside down. An uncomfortable feeling. Above, the birds chirp, lightning my mood and making me able to go inside the house.

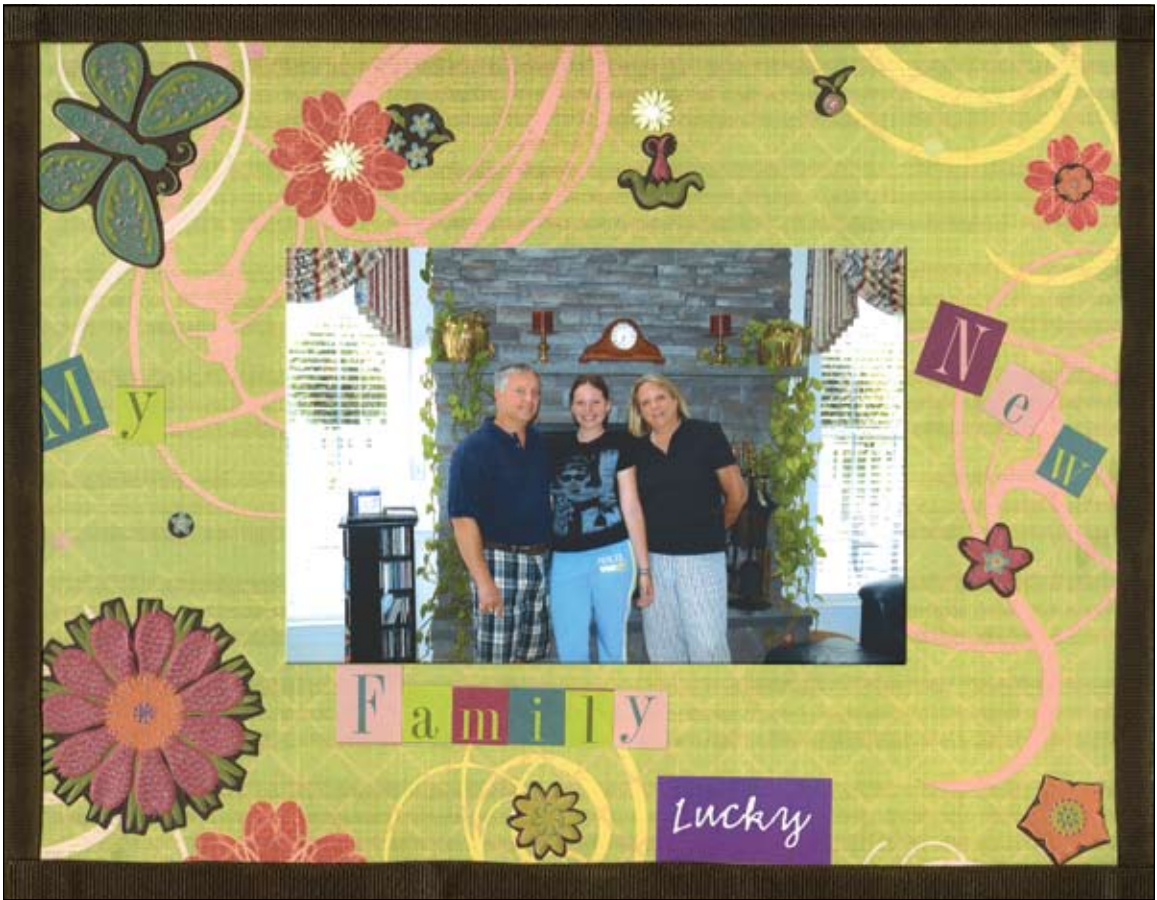
Note: please see Karen's companion piece on page 60.

Karen

Shatorria · Age 17 · Chesterfield, VA

MY POEM

How should I rest the burdens that lye on my chest lying around pretending everything's okay not knowing if I will live to see another day. Will I be punished for all my wrongs. When judgement day comes will I be able to stand strong. So I sit there staring out my window in a blank stare. I will survive this nightmare I fight all of my battles on my own yes me standing here all alone I wonder if anyone will miss me while I'm gone. A vivid picture of happiness that was once shown has now blown the uplifting spirits I used to have disappeared but would you be surprised that the misery has reappeared. Now I just want hide But that would only deny my pride. So who should I confide. One day the darkness will END and a NEW life of rejoice will began.



Kimberley · Age 16 · Fairfax, VA

NEW FAMILY

Candace · Age 17 · Richmond, VA

THE LIFE OF A FOSTER CHILD

Little by little events in my life led up to my downfall. The death of my guardian, and its heavy burden on my heart were enough to bring on misery that made me more insane than I should be. An innocent girl who'd been confined to sweets and non-fiction images most of her life had very little pain and understanding of the consequences of life.

Every night I was reminded of the tragic death when I woke up from the nightmare in a cold sweat just realizing it was real. Everyday I was cut down even more from my grandmother's harsh words. School wasn't any better all I found there was cruelty and insecure children I couldn't seem to relate to. Every year proved how unstable my life had become and I just kept moving here to there skipping from family member to family member, but never fitting into the family. At this point everything hurt and my future looked hopeless. Then in the moment the shadow of misery had washed over me it was replaced by terror. I screamed and cried as I heard crackling explosions shoot through the air. This could have killed me but it was truly to save my life. After the explosions had ceased the beings responsible for the past uproar took me away.

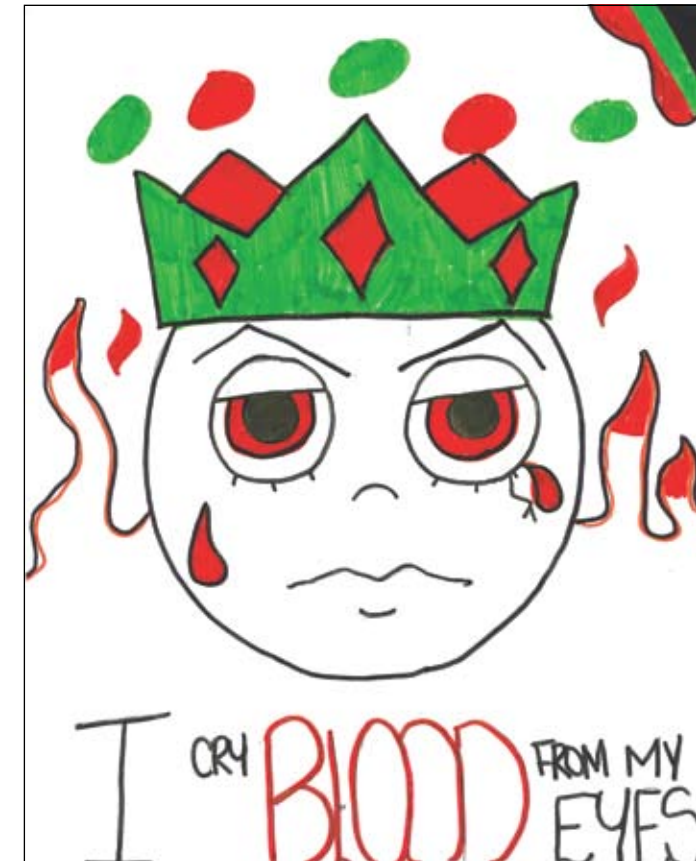
Lost in my state of reverie I wasn't sure where they were taking me or what they were saying, but I knew my life would never be the same again. The fields of change are where I was brought. This is the place where I'd be resurrected. A place where the caring smiles of strangers watched over me like fully bloomed glorious flowers. Kneeling down to except my fate I look up and see a bril-

liant light shine over me. When the tears begin to pour down my face it isn't out of fear it was out of freedom.

*Freedom from the years of misery,
sadness,
despair,
anguish,
confusion,
pain,
depression,
rage,
regret,
agony,
longing,
oppression,
frustration,
insanity,
anger,
self-torture,
fear,
worry,
false-hope,
hate,
and lies...*

This was my beginning, my hope, my dreams and the guidance of my future.

I became human again the gravestone skin and hollow eyes began to crumble down and reveal a radiant and happy lady whose journey had just unleashed.



Jacqueline · Age 15 · Midlothian, VA

VIRGINIA FOSTER CARE ROCKS! THE STORY OF MY LIFE

*I have been abused and hurt physically, emotionally, and verbally.
I thought that the abuse would never come to an end but I guess I was wrong.
My foster mom walked into my life and made a difference.*

Frances · Age 13 · Hanover, VA

CLUE-LESS

Have you never knew wat to do, Have you never had a clue I feel so low, like
I've been hit with a big blow I have so much on my chest my thoughts are
just a huge mess, I have never felt so much stress I feel as I am lost in my
own house I feel so hurt and so much anger I miss my brothers so much
I don't know what 2 do I feel as there is no air How do I breathe when
I am so clueless, I must confess I feel worried sick, I eat more than usual
when I am like this what do I do when I have no clue
I guess I am just clueless



Qwneshina · Age 16 · Roanoke, VA

THE NEW KID

This picture is about a teenage girl who has been in foster care for two weeks. She had to start a new school. She doesn't have any friends and she feels very lonely and out of place. This picture depicts the way that children feel in foster care when they have to start over in a new home and a new school.

Poncella · Age 16 · Lawrenceville, VA

LIFE

I'm only 15 years old
And I done seen it all
From the fiens knocking on my door
To my dad being locked up behind bars
From people selling drugs in & out of my house
Not knowing what's it all about
From living in the projects
From living in the streets
From blood soaking from head to my feet
No one see's the pain that lies beneath
My emotions I have are very deep
No one see's what goes on inside of me
The pain I fail to keep
To see my best friend die right in my arms
To feel the tears forming in my eyes
To all shattered blood on my clothes
As the lord opened the doors
To see the warrior sore's on his body
To realize he never hurt any body
And now he's in a better place
From moving to place to place
From having nine guns being put in my face
I done lost my family
I done lost my friend
Honestly I don't know where my life begin & end
My life led me down a rough road
The hurt I carry is a tough road
My emotions & feelings mixed up in one
Back again what has life done
In my head I had no doubt

How my life was going to turn out
It didn't turn out the way I planned it
But I did manage
To see my sister stab my father with a knife
To people telling me that everything is going to be alright
Whatever makes me happy is to my satisfaction
I decided to hide my emotions
I try so hard to stay alive
But it's killing me to survive
I don't want to hurt any more
I'm tired of people treating me like dirt
I'm tired of my feelings getting hurt
People say sky is the limit
Tomorrow is filled with anger
Today is filled with hurt
The tears I cry are warm & bitter
The tears I cry come from all the pain inside
I let my emotions go
But the hurt continue to show
The tears I cry feels like bullets
Falling down my face
To you I was a big disgrace
The tears I cry is silent
But when they fall down my face
It feels like love that has been erased
So as I sit here & wipe the last tears from my eyes
It feels as though all my fears has been demise
So as I sit here and end this poem remember these words
Hate is kept with all the pain inside
I fail to realize what makes me cry.

when they fall down my face
it feels like love that has been erased



Emily · Age 18 · Charlottesville, VA

PICTURES OF FEELINGS

Jennifer · Age 12 · Arlington, VA

WHAT MOST FOSTER KIDS THINK

When you are a foster kid all that's going through your mind is ... will I ever get to see my family? Also kids may not know how to describe their frustration, either because they are too young or maybe they don't have anybody to talk to. All we kids need is someone to be there for us. Kids need to know that you will stay with them for good or bad, they also need to know that you love them and care for them.



Otis · Blackwater, VA

LIVE DAY BY DAY

*Foster care has shown me not to take anything for granted
because you could be moved from your home at any time.*

Demetrius · Age 18 · Chesapeake, VA

LIFE IN FOSTER CARE

On October 4, 2004, I was brought to the [B's] house in Chesapeake, VA. It started off hard because I missed my own family and it was a different place to call home. One of the biggest problems in foster care was trusting adults because I had been lied to so many times before. I let my foster parents do everything like set up doctor appointments or call in medication to the pharmacy. I was used to doing that myself and it was hard to let go.

After that, I was still dealing with my spinal cord injury and the fact that my life is changed forever. I had to learn to express my feelings and get my opinion across about my health and the medications I need due to my injury. The first few months I was in foster care, I started going to see a therapist for depression. I talked to him about how I feel about my injury and everything. I saw him every Wednesday for an hour. Jerry, the therapist, and Miss Greta, my foster mom, told me it is O.K. to get depressed, but I shouldn't stay in depression mode. This has helped me to become a better person as I trust in adults and give them a chance.

Foster care prepared me for the real world like college and living on my own with a spinal cord injury. I don't want to give up on walking and the sky is the limit! I've got to believe in myself.

Foster care is an experience because my home is rich in positive influences. There are five boys in the home ranging in age from the twins at age 10 to Ronnie who is 15. Ronnie and I are foster sons living here with the three [B's] brothers. We are all treated as family, and I don't have to put on a show to fit in. I can just be myself. We are taken care of here, but I'm encouraged to be independent and do things for myself.

Being here has helped me refocus and change the direction of my life. I have a supportive framework to deal with my problems like the pressure sores and other medical problems that may lead to surgery. I deal with everything as it comes. And foster care helped me find my potential.

At age 13, if someone asked me what I wanted to do with my life, I was already doing it. My brothers and I were selling cocaine. Now I know that I have other choices like college, and writing my stories, and becoming a motivational speaker. I have a lot more to show for my accomplishments since the accident than I had before. I have good grades, recognition for my writing, respect from others, and mostly I have self-respect!



Kim · Age 14 · Martinsville, VA

CAMP AT PHILPOT LAKE

My foster family is different from other foster families. Do you want to know why? They take their foster kids out to experience something we've never experienced before. They take us on awesome trips. My foster parents love to go camping. We camped at several places but I liked camping at Gettysburg and Philpot Lake the best.



Adam · Age 15 · Jonesville, VA

DARKNESS STANDS TOO LIGHT!

People that are lost
People that lost all light
They are consumed in darkness
Left with indelible scars in their heart
People that never felt love and felt nothing but sorrow and hate
People that never see smiles but only evil faces of hate
People that just want to fit in
But keep getting kicked out in the cold
People that just want to be understood
And told that there is hope and a future for them to come
But do not listen to people that say you are dumb you are just
Afraid and dread to see what your life is going to become
Fear not the world fear only those who are evil and filled with hate
Stay positive with your life do not let those scavenge your heart
And pray to God that He will be on your side getting ready for
Battle against those who are willing and able to destroy your heart
Fear not the Almighty God that He is your father he will protect
You From anything that tries to bother
He will always be their even when it feels like theirs no hope
He will guide you like a dog on a leash helping you climb
That long rocky slope and when you climb to the top you will
Realize that God is a man filled with hope then God will heal those
Indelible scars in your heart then your life will be heading for a
New Start so now I hope your living in the right so for one day
When you die you will reach that ultimate light!



Adam · Age 15 · Jonesville, VA

DARKNESS STANDS TOO LIGHT!

Heaven · Age 15 · Lynchburg, VA

CHANGES

Being a foster kid made everything change.
Riding in the car thinking to myself nothing will ever be the same.
As those thoughts ran through my mind,
Everything passing by one at a time.

My heart beating fast,
The only thing on my mind was my past.
Tears are falling from my eyes,
All I can do is sigh.

I can't breathe,
My eyes filled with tears make it hard to see.
We're almost there,
I feel like all of this isn't fair.

Sitting in a room,
My foster mom would be here soon.
When she got there,
I got a feeling in my stomach. It was fear.

On the way to the house,
Everything was as quiet as a mouse.
Going down the road,
I felt sick knowing my life was going to change.

Finally we got there,
It was hard to bare.
Everyone was really nice,
It wasn't so bad.



Lexus · Age 12 · Stafford, VA

MY LIFE

On the left is a drawing of my mother Barbie. The reason why there's a huge eight behind my mom is because she took care of me for eight years. My drawing on the right is my second mom (Rhonda). She is a single mom who took care of me and my brother for three and a half years. My foster parents Bruce and Shanta have taken care of me for one year. My dad is a police officer plus he's a wonderful dad. My mom is a house mom. She takes care of the trouble at home. She also takes care of business if you know what I mean. I have so much fun with my new family.



Candace · Age 17 · Richmond, VA

THE LIFE OF A FOSTER CHILD

The life of a foster child is not as it seems. Anyone can make it out here in this world with their mind set on the right goals.

When I first came into care I thought it was going to be the worst day of my life. After seeing all the help that people was offering I became happy to be a foster child. They show you all the love you may think you could never get back at home. It open my eyes and let me know there are bigger and better things out in the world, then living a life of crime and hate.

Although I'm only 17 and to some people I'm still a child I know more then what people think. Because coming into foster care I was 16 and had a daughter Aurianna and she was almost one years old. I had lost custody of my daughter when she was about two weeks old, and it was very hard for me to make it through.

After being in custody for about three or four months I came to a teen maternity group home and it change my life for the better. Now the judge is willing to give me over-night visitation at least three times a week.

Mrs. [S] which is the owner and the program director helped me focus on the things I need rather than the things I want.

She also got me thinking about colleges and other future goals. The staff at the group home has also been helping me look for jobs and learn about the colleges in and around Richmond, VA.

Since in Richmond my attitude has been showing some improvement, and the reason I say that is because back in Culpeper all I did was start fights and keep drama going. Now I'm not gone sit here and play all innocent like I'm perfect now. I have had my fair share of trouble since being in Richmond, but these ups and downs just made me the better person I am today.

It takes a lot of courage for me to write this paper about my struggles in my life. But Mrs. [S] told me to do it for a reason. And that reason is because she believes in me and I never had anyone to truly believe in me.

I wanted anyone interested to know that foster care isn't as bad as most people make it out to be. It's actually the best things for any child to experience rather than being on the streets or locked up.

And after all my struggles I can sit here today and say that I'm happy I have THE LIFE OF A FOSTER CHILD.



Cody · Age 18 · Jonesville, VA

LIFE IN FOSTER CARE

This is like my foster home. My foster home is a great place to live.



Luvinia · Age 14 · Mechanicsville, VA

WHO AM I

Who Am I
I am a legendary teenage female
Who survived oppression and quickly learned her lesson
Who Am I
I am a survival of Mystery Woman
Who quickly tried to destroy me
Annoy me
Stayed over top of me
Until I was smart enough to tell her what she's doing won't kill me but only make me stronger
Who Am I
I am an Inspiration
In those of hard times
I am an Interpretation
To those misunderstanding teenagers of all races who could barely understand themselves
But still overcome Mental, Physical, and Emotional hell
Who Am I
I am History
I am Stories
People read and take Heed
Who Am I
I am a Nomination for the Grammy's
Of how I Overcame
Played the Devil's Game
Survived the tricks of the trade
Hell I was a trick who being traded
Who Am I
I am A Survival who Survived the Street's Games

I am a survival



Shawna · Age 13 · Lynchburg, VA

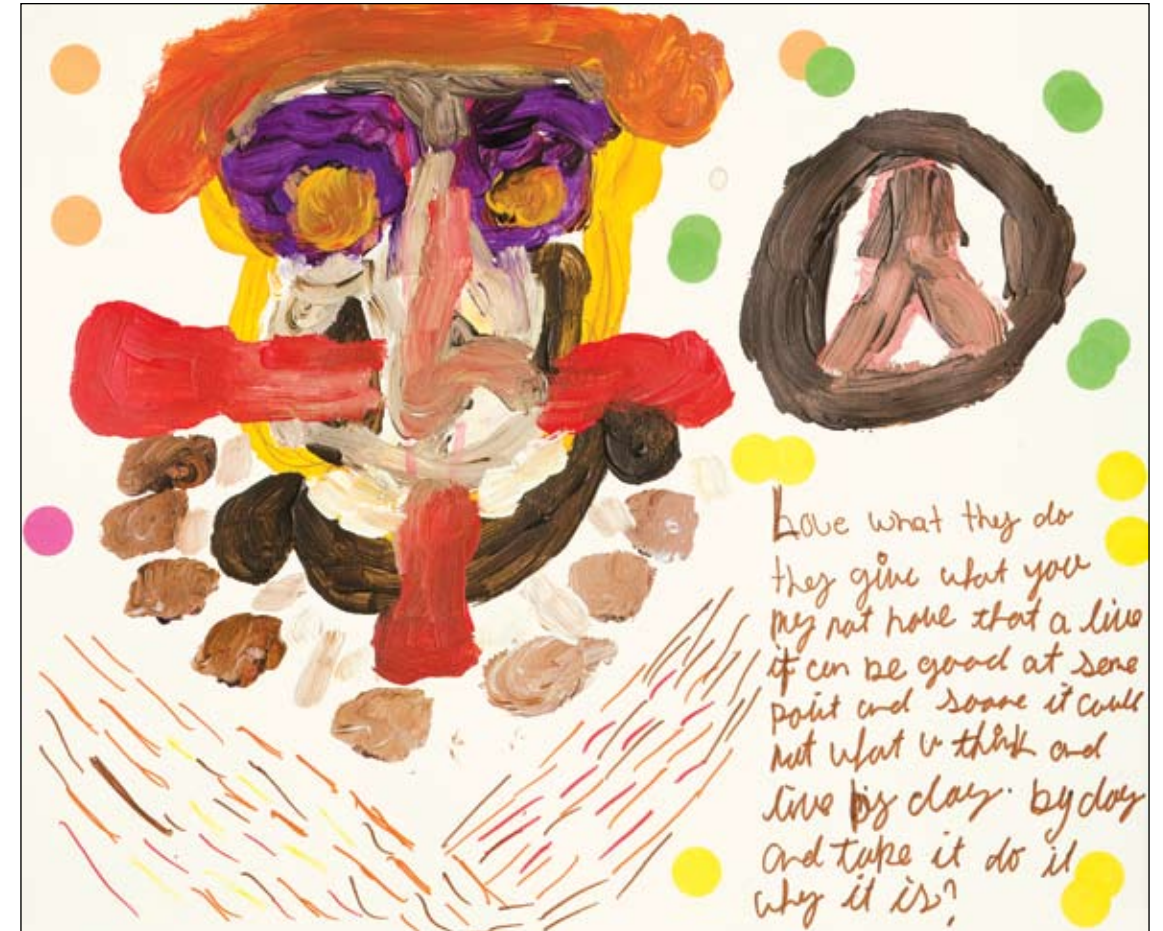
GROWTH

*When I came into foster care I was, scared, lonely and heartbroken...
This photograph shows how I felt when I came into foster care and how I feel now which is more
mature, more confident and I feel like I have grown so much. That tree symbolizes me.*

Crystal · Age 17 · Stafford, VA

FOSTER CARE

No, I wasn't that good,
Not really that bad.
But you held my hand,
Even when I was sad.
I have my own family,
And you became my new.
Not to replace the other,
Just to love me for a few.
We've had our rough times,
Our ups and our downs.
I always try to make you smile,
I don't like to see those frowns.
We've traveled around,
And had our fun.
I hope when I'm eight-teen,
It all won't be done.
Soon she will see,
The good in me.
Then may be we could be,
That happy family.
Until then,
I'll be right here.
In your arms,
So loving and so dear.



Brandon · Age 18 · Duffield, VA

LIFE IN THE WORLD OF PEOPLE IN FOSTER CARE

Karen · Age 17 · Arlington, VA

MI VIDA

It started with one. One turning to two. Two turning to three. Three turning to more. Continuously I heard “dame mas,” give me more. The look on her face blurred. She no longer was mine, but its. Alcohol is her lover. She never lets it go. There I am, five, holding my newborn baby sister. Calming her down, I handed my mom her lover and fed my little sister her milk. Getting up I looked at our room, a mess. Clothes everywhere, plates piled up, and dust on everything. Our happy home, a messy land mined. I placed my sister in her crib and turned on her lullaby music. Soon she was asleep. I went back to the living room. There she was on display for everyone to see, on the couch, a drunken mother, nothing else. I went to the kitchen, pulling out rice, chicken, and eggs. I set them on the counter filled with roach killing stuff. I washed the pan and pot and then put them on the stove. I turned on the stove and heated the butter on the pan. A minute later I put rice in a pot filled with water. I thought this is upsetting, me, cooking even though I have no idea how to. I stirred the rice, 30 minutes later, the water was gone, and I added more. Another 30 minutes, the rice was swollen up, thick, and soft. I stirred it to get the rice on the bottom unstuck. Then I put it in the pan and added eggs into it. Two eggs gone, two chicks dead. I mixed the mixture until the eggs were not wet. I decided no on the chicken. I placed my dinner in a plate and added salt and ketchup on my eggs and rice. I looked at the clock, 10:30. The tick-tick-tock of the clock was my friend in this messy, disgusting house. Around 11:00 I went to the room and looked at our king size bed. My older sister was already asleep at 8:30. She was seven years old and no longer my buddy. Not only did I lose a mom to her lover, but my older sis-

ter to her friend Lillian. The days of us with our dad at a park, gone, our twin dresses, ruined. Sitting on the bed, I decided to give up. Who cares if our house messy, who cares if dad finally married a woman, who cares if mom is drunk, who cares if I care? This house is a lonely place, no longer a warming home to enter, no longer my safe house of happiness. Then I looked to my left, in the crib was my reason to not give up. For her sake, my baby sister will have the life that was taken away from me.

I knew deep in my heart that I forever lost my loving mother and that no one would raise my baby sister. I had to. That day I became a “mother.” I learned to cook arroz con leche, arroz con pollo y tamales. I cleaned my house, removing the roaches and cleaned up the kitchen and bathroom. I did the laundry, with help from my cousin Vivian. I took my baby sister everywhere with me. Never out of my sight. For years it was like this ... until I turned 11 and my once a baby sister, six. We were taken away from home and placed into three different houses. Then it hit me, like a bullet hitting its target. A big explosion happened. My heart seized beating for only a minute. My palms went damp. This was not normal. I shouldn’t be taking care of my little sister, mom should. She shouldn’t be drunk or go to clubs. This was crazy. I was crazy. Yet I didn’t care. I wanted to better myself and make my little sister happy. That is when every little thing I did was clear. I was in denial. I did not want to believe that all this was happening to me. I wanted to go back. I was given two choices: choice one was to go back home or choice two, to continue living under my placement. I chose the one that hurt me a lot more, but probably would benefit me in the end. Choice two.



Xantha · Age 14 · Waverly, VA

HELD BACK

The hand balled into a fist represents myself standing strong and sticking up for what I believe in. The metal “hand cuff” is illustrating how I am held down by my actions, others, and the hard times I go through.

ART
HONORABLE
MENTION

Victoria · Age 17 · Newport News, VA

FOSTER FAMILIES

My father killed my one and only mother when I was ten years old.

As my mother once said, "I will always love you, Bryon and Frannie."

Let me explain what that means to me.

It means my mother's love will reach us from heaven all the way down to earth. The "Replacements" poem and picture is talking about foster care, for an example, like Social Services, they will not take the place of my mother, but they will provide me with love and support that my mother would give me naturally.

What kind of love?

Love like an ocean breeze soft and gentle.

Love like little cute puppies.

Love like a mother elephant and her baby elephant with hearts floating around their heads.

Love like a mother with wings of an angel!

A mother is suppose to take care of her children and give them love, support and be gentle yet firm. A mother should be there for her children and love them through the good and bad times.

Foster care families support me with love and provide a shoulder to lean on, like a loving mother does for her children. I am grateful for foster care families and their positive treatments that they have for all children who need a home and a positive environment to live in. Foster families have gained a lot of healthy communication with their kids and gain love, respect, and appreciation from their adopted children because they value every little and big thing that their parents are doing because they either lost or never had the love of their parents.

Thank you foster families for being the "Replacements" of my mom and dad.



Victoria · 17 · Newport News, VA

THE REPLACEMENTS

Joseph · Age 15 · Jonesville, VA

HOW I FEEL ABOUT FOSTER CARE

I feel good about Foster care that people take their time to go to Foster care schooling on how to be a foster parent so kids a go safte, home to live in and to no that you have a good safte plase to lay your head down and sleep at and to no that you got people that care about you and want you to make something of your self so you can be able to support your own self so that one day when you get married you will be able to take good care of your kids and families and be able to support you own familie one day and so you will be able to show your kids worgn from right Foster families can get kids some people would love to have kids that can't have kids for some reazan and you have some foster families that just want kids to work all the time and not to have no time to do stuff that they want to do wen you get Foster kids in your home to live with you if you do not get atachet to the child then yor are not in foster care for the child safety you are just in it for the money that you get for keeping the child Kids should show respect to the Foster Families that is keeping them because a lot of people would not just open the door and take a strange kid in that they don't even no in they didn't love take care of kids That how I feel about foster care!

foster families can get kids
some people would love to have kids
that can't have kids



J Maxwell · Age 13 · Virginia Beach, VA

BROKEN HEART MENDED INTO JOY

*I used to have a broken heart but a person in my life inspired me
and taught me to forgive and freed me from the trouble I went through.
She is in the process of adopting me and my four brothers and sisters.*

Eric · Age 14 · Lynchburg, VA

PEACE THROUGHOUT

On earth we should have Peace. Peace is the leash that will hold us back from violence, violence then turns into war and war is like a closed door that will never re-open no matter how hard we try to open it. Everyday we hear that a lot of people die from war and when this happens all we do is send more. Why do we do this? Violence is not the answer neither is war, but Peace is the answer and something we need more!



Derek · Age 14 · Fairfax, VA

DAYDREAMING

*Serenity ... peace ... the calming sound of the water as it winds its sleepy way to the ocean.
The peaceful noise the wind makes as it caresses the leaves of each beautifully green tree.
The vision of the clouds silently crossing the sky. And as you look at the reflection of trees in the
background scenery you see yourself calm and full of energy.*

Beth · Age 15 · Stafford, VA

FOSTER CARE

There are all sorts of ways foster care can affect people. It might not always be for good but it is definitely for the better. Foster care is here to help kids get a second chance on life. A life they never got a chance to have.

I know that kids in foster care have different lengths of time. I have been in foster care for almost four years and have been in three different homes at fifteen years old. I never thought that I would ever been put in foster care. But here I am and it has helped me in ways you can't imagine. And yet I'm standing here today able to say I think I might almost even be happy to have been put in to foster care. People say that I'm weird I just say I'm me it's who I am and how I act this is me....

It is hard to say that my life is bad because people have had worse things happen to them. But I know that what happen to me is done and I have moved on. I am happy to say I have managed to help people that are younger and older than me it feels good to have people thanking me but it really wasn't me speaking it was my knowledge that I have accumulated over the last 15 years of my shaky life.

I am proud to say that I do have people who care for me if it wasn't for them I would probably be dead by now. I will never understand what happened but what I do know is that I've learned so much in the process. Your life doesn't have to be horrible all you got to do is believe in yourself and let God do the rest because we were all put here for a reason that we might not know yet but will figure out life is what you make it so make what you want it to be. Don't ever let people stand in your way do what you feel is right. Don't be afraid to ask for help either because that what we are here for to help you understand that life is bad but you can always make it better because life is what you make it so lets make it ... ROCK. Things happen for a reason or so they say.... You may or may not believe that but there is nothing I can do about it. Life goes by so fast you don't really know what hit you until the damage is done. So pain is a part of life just as joy and hope but they are your feelings to choose or feel not anyone else's. I believe in what I do for a reason because I've had lots of things going on in my life.



Daekwon · Age 14 · Richmond, VA

A NEW BEGINNING

*I am about to have a new start and a new beginning with a new family.
I feel hopeful and scared and worried at the same time.*

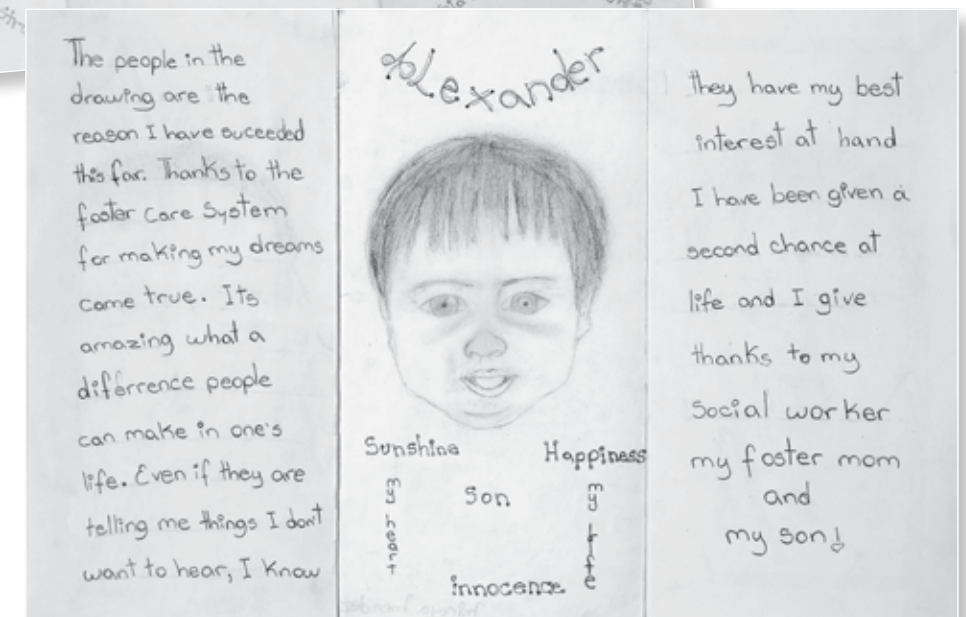


Nicole · Age 13 · Richmond, VA

HOW I FEEL ABOUT FOSTER CARE

My life in foster care changed me a lot. I changed by speaking up more and not being shy. I've learned a different culture by being in a black family. I've been to a lot of places that helped me with my family. What I think about foster care is I needed to be here so I can fix what needed to be fixed in the past. What I feel about foster care is happy and sad. I'm happy because I know things will be better when I'm home and I'm sad because I'm away from my family. That's what I feel about foster care.

The End



Mireya · Age 19 · Sterling, VA

SPECIAL PEOPLE

My drawing is about the special people in my life they are and they always be like a family for me.



Ashmon · Age 18 · Richmond, VA
MY LOVE IS YOUR LOVE



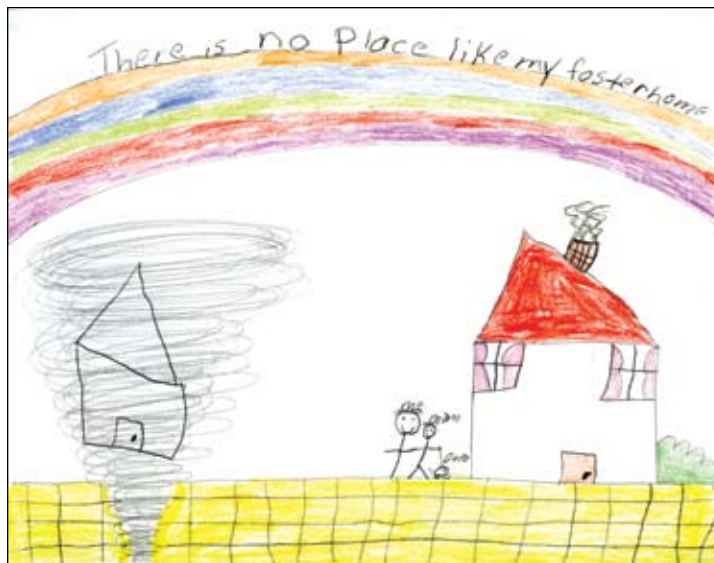
Elizabeth · Age 16 · Buchanan, VA
MY STORMY LIFE



Donte · Age 16 · Stafford, VA
FOSTER CARE: FUN TIMES



Michelle · Age 17 · Virginia
BASKETBALL GIRL



Amber · Age 16
Norton, VA
THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE
MY FOSTER HOME

Brittany · Age 14
Mechanicsville, VA
THE HEART OF AN
ABANDONED CHILD





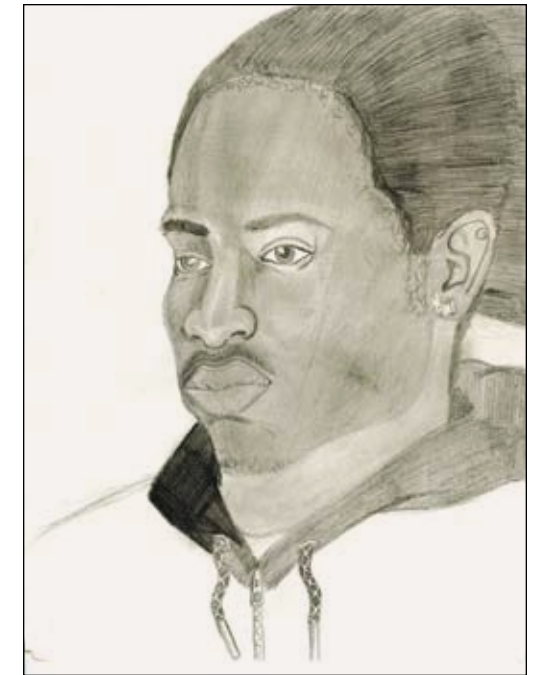
Isbell · Age 17 · Staunton, VA
MY WORLD



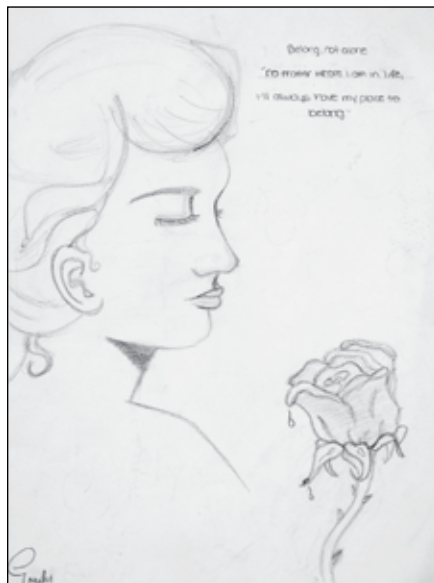
Marisol · Age 12 · Stafford, VA
FOSTER CARE



Kim · Age 14 · Martinsville, VA
OBSESSED WITH FASHION



John · Age 18 · Fairfax, VA
SELF PORTRAIT

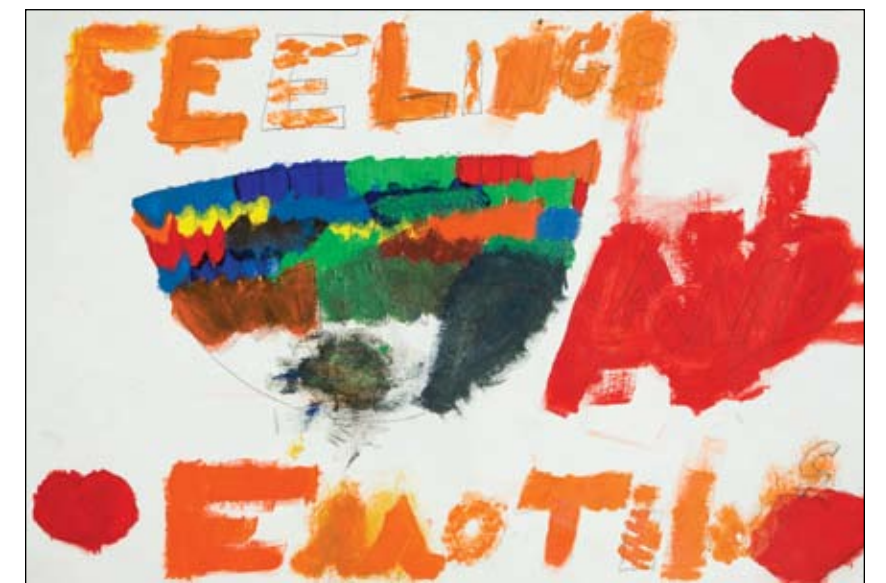


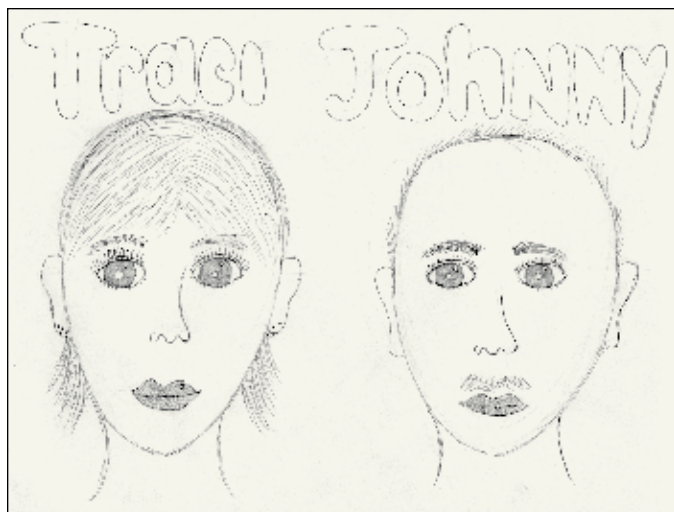
(far left) **Emily** · Age 16
Richmond, VA
BELONG



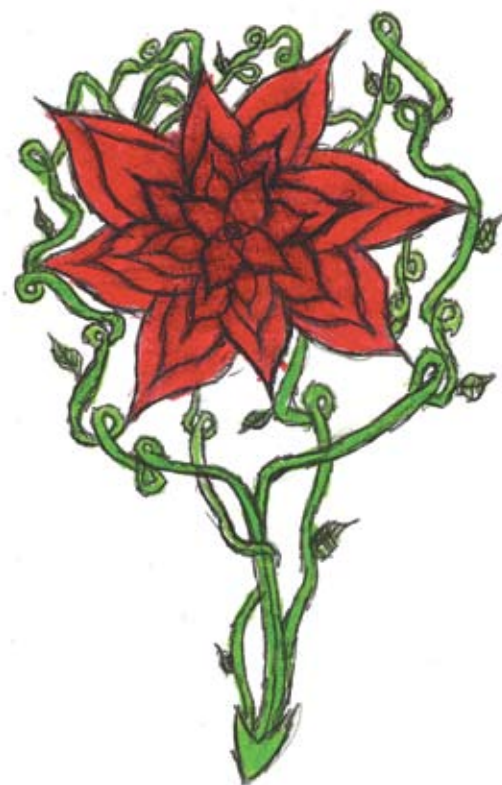
(left) **Shante** · Age 20
Charlottesville, VA
UNTITLED

(right) **Amanda** · Age 13
Chesterfield, VA
PICTURES
OF FEELINGS





Heaven · Age 15 · Lynchburg, VA
PARENTS



(above) Jacob · Age 14
Roanoke, VA

THE LIVING ROSE

(left) Brittney · Age 16
Richmond, VA

FAMILY



About the Judges

STACY HAWKINS ADAMS is the author of four nationally-published inspirational fiction novels, including *Watercolored Pearls*. She is a former staff writer for the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* and now writes a parenting column for the newspaper. Stacy also has penned an online parenting column for Governor Tim Kaine's Smart Beginnings initiative and serves as a community relations spokesperson for Prevent Child Abuse Virginia.



MICHAEL K. LEASE received an MFA in Photography and Film from Virginia Commonwealth University in the Spring of 2005. Since that time he has worked on a number of solo and collaborative projects. In addition to his personal work, Michael also teaches photography at VCU and works as the Gallery Associate at VCU's Anderson Gallery.



SARA WILSON MCKAY is an Assistant Professor of Art Education at Virginia Commonwealth University. Her research has included the politics of vision and visuality, the ways in which art creates new seeing, the dialogic process of looking, and realizing the educational process in and through art. Dr. Wilson McKay enjoys teaching undergraduate and graduate courses emphasizing service-learning in the Richmond area.



ADRIANA TRIGIANI is beloved by millions of readers around the world for her hilarious and heartwarming novels. Adriana was raised in a small coal mining town in southwest Virginia in a big Italian family. She chose her hometown for the setting and title of her debut novel, the critically acclaimed and bestselling *Big Stone Gap*, followed by the sequels *Big Cherry Holler* and *Milk Glass Moon*. Since 2000, Adriana has delivered a novel a year to her devoted fans. *Lucia, Lucia*, *The Queen of the Big Time*, and *Rococo* were all instant *New York Times* bestsellers. Adriana has been featured on *The Today Show*, *CBS Sunday Morning*, and National Public Radio. Fans can also expect to see Adriana's work on the big screen, as final preparations are underway to produce her *Big Stone Gap* screenplay, which she has written and will direct.



SHELLY BECHTEL SHEPHERD is a resident artist and instructor at the Visual Arts Center of Richmond, Virginia, where she was elected Master Teacher in 2002. In 2006, the center presented her its Distinguished Service Award. She gains national recognition annually and was featured in an article in the September 2004 issue of *American Artist Magazine*. She teaches workshops throughout the United States and juries a variety of regional shows. She is represented by Suitable for Framing and Fan Frame in Richmond, Virginia and the Allegheny Highlands Arts and Crafts Center in Clifton Forge, Virginia. Ms. Shepherd is a member of the Virginia Water Color Society, the National Water Color Society and the National Association of Women Artists.



Voices for Change Steering Committee

First Lady Anne Holton - Committee Chairwoman

The Honorable William H. Fralin, Jr

The Honorable Phillip A. Hamilton

The Honorable Janet D. Howell

The Honorable Terry G. Kilgore

The Honorable William C. Mims

The Honorable Patricia S. Ticer

The Honorable Jeion A. Ward

Stacy Hawkins Adams - Author, Speaker and Freelance Journalist

Kyle Leftwich Banning, Esq. - Marks and Harrison

Ralph F. Boyd, Jr. - Freddie Mac Foundation

Robin Foster, MD - VCU Health System, Pediatric Emergency Medicine

George H. Hettrick, Esq. - Hunton and Williams

Iris E. Holliday - Dominion

Jo Kennedy - Visual Arts Center of Richmond

Lisa Mathey - FACES of Virginia’s Families

Samantha Wheeler Marrs - Virginia Commonwealth University

Patty Nicholas - Community Volunteer

John Oakey, Esq. - McGuireWoods

Renette Oklewicz - Freddie Mac Foundation

Pamela J. Royal, MD - Royal Dermatology and Aesthetic Skin Care, Inc.

Ann Rust - Virginia Commission for the Arts

Adriana Trigiani - Best-selling Author

Rob Ukrop - Motivational Speaker and Soccer Coach

Benefactors

PATRON LEVEL

Court Improvement Program,
Office of the Executive Secretary,
Supreme Court of Virginia

Dominion

FRIEND LEVEL

Anne’s Book Group

i-Barthi Health Foundation

Marks & Harrison

Hunton & Williams

WORKSHOP SPONSORS

Virginia Department of Social Services,
Foster Care Independent Living Program

Casey Strategic Consulting Group,
The Annie E. Casey Foundation

IN-KIND CONTRIBUTORS

Design: Al Marschall, Studio SGS

Image Processing: David Everette, A Better Image

Paper: Beth Shumaker, BW Wilson Paper Company, Inc.

Printing: Digital Banana, Inc.

Thank You

*to the following
Virginia authors
for signing and
donating copies of
their novels to our
contest winners:*



DAVID BALDACCI
SHARYN MCCRUMB
LEE SMITH
ADRIANA TRIGIANI

**WHAT WE DO
EVERY DAY,
POWERS YOUR
EVERY DAY.**



www.dom.com

© 2008 Dominion

—

Court Improvement Program,
Office of the Executive Secretary,
Supreme Court of Virginia
through federal grant funds of
the U.S. Department of
Health and Human Services

—