



April 2014
A Former DYS Youth Speaks Out

We are in the business of serving youth, and soliciting feedback and ideas from youth is important for us to better meet the needs of those we serve. By listening to feedback from those who have been with us, we learn about the strengths and weaknesses of our approaches. This month I've turned over the monthly brief to Mr. L who left DYS 10 years ago to become a positive and contributing citizen. The following is what he had to say.

I spent a total of 6 years at DYS, and I aged out when I was 21 years old. I would say that overall, it was a positive experience.

My social worker really cared, and she motivated me to excel. I was able to get my high school diploma and take college classes. I felt like I was learning something when the teachers really taught me –when they didn't just hand over a book and expect me to learn from it. When I got out, I finished my college degree, and that was the best experience of my life. I had never dreamed I could do that. All kids need this opportunity.

My grandmom came to visit me every week. I felt like I owed it to her to get my life together. When I got out, I was able to give back to her before she passed.

Some staff were cool, and some staff were hard to trust. With some, there was a power struggle. It's all about building relationships. Youth can sense the type of person that you are. Don't make it an "us against them" thing. Care. Treat the youth like your own kids.

One of the programs that was helpful was called the Transitional Housing Unit. When I got out, I was prepared to have my own apartment. Give youth tools. Teach them to cook, set up a bank account, and be ready for job interviews. They need these skills prior to release to be successful.

If you work hard, eventually you can achieve your goals. Certain things I had to learn the hard way. Contrary to what some people believe, people can change.

I thank Mr. L for sharing and want him to know that he has made us very proud. He's right: youth can change. Mr. L is a shining example of how a young person can take responsibility and create a better future. That's why we do what we do. When we are trustworthy, encouraging, thoughtful, and fully dedicated to the young people we serve, it makes all the difference.