Hear Their Voices

Stories of America’s Most Vulnerable Kids

by CHILDREN'S RIGHTS
STANDING UP FOR CHILDREN

Hear Their Voices
Stories of America’s Most Vulnerable Kids

CHILDREN’S RIGHTS
PROTECTING KIDS. PROVIDING HOPE.
It’s hard to believe. But their stories are true.

Every day, kids are harmed by the very child support networks charged with caring for them. They are unfairly separated from their parents and siblings; shuttled from one foster home to another; institutionalized in unsafe settings; prescribed dangerous medications to sedate them; denied basic physical and mental healthcare; and incarcerated under inhumane and illegal conditions. Children’s Rights exists to make sure their stories have happy endings.
Every year, more than 800,000 children are trapped in broken foster care and juvenile justice systems across the United States.

60% of domestic child trafficking victims come from foster care and group homes.

7th grade is the average reading level they will achieve by age 17.
1 in 4 foster care alumni will be diagnosed with PTSD as adults (twice the rate of US war veterans).

Children in foster care are prescribed cocktails of powerful medications at three times the national average—often without other psychological care—that can leave them foggy and unable to function.
In 2016, over 17,000 young people aged out of foster care without the state finding them a family.

31% of those who age out find themselves homeless or couch surfing;

50% of children in foster care do not graduate from high school by the age of 18.

Of those who graduate from high school, only 4% will go on to receive a four-year college degree.
and up to

**74% of men and 42% of women**
who have aged out of foster care spend time in jail.

---

**50%**
of foster care alumni will become unemployed by age 24.

---

**71%**
of female foster care alumnae will become pregnant by age 19.
Finding Permanent Homes
Sienna – Age 16, Florida

Sienna has been in and out of foster care since she was three years old. She was sexually abused. She’s just 16 years old and in the last four years, she’s been moved 25 times and placed in 17 different “homes.” Sometimes, she would only be in her new home for a few hours before she was moved again. She could not attend regular school consistently. Night after night, the moves became so frequent that she left her belongings in her caseworker’s car instead of bothering to unpack.

“Why am I good enough for one week, but not good enough to stay?” she once asked.

No child should be shuttled from place to place, living out of the back seat of a car. Children’s Rights is fighting to make sure Sienna and thousands of other kids have a safe and stable home.
Stopping Medication Abuse
Marcus – Age 14, Missouri

Marcus is a 14-year-old who should be excited about high school. Instead, because of behavior issues related to his childhood trauma, he has been administered at least six psychotropic drugs in the last three years, including powerful antipsychotics. It’s hard to know for sure because none of his caregivers were ever given accurate physical and mental health records by the state. He’s suffered dangerous side effects like hyperthyroidism from the drugs. He’s been in eight foster care placements.

Children’s Rights has brought a landmark civil rights lawsuit focused on stopping the overuse of powerful drugs like those given to Marcus.
Keeping Siblings Together
Cheyenne – Age 19, Texas

Cheyenne, 19, has seven younger siblings. As the loving big sister, she dreamed that the whole family would be placed in foster care to live a better life together. Instead, they were split up. Later, two of her little brothers showed up for a visit with bloody lips and cuts and bruises. Their hands were seared with cigarette burns.

“Our house wasn’t the greatest,” she said, “but it definitely wasn’t as bad as foster care.”

In our lawsuit against the State of Texas, Children’s Rights is fighting to protect vulnerable children like Cheyenne and her siblings whose dreams have become a nightmare.
Protecting LGBTQ Youth

Sam – Age 17, Louisiana

17-year-old Sam was assigned female at birth but identifies as male. His parents refused to accept his gender identity. The trauma caused Sam to threaten harm to himself. He was admitted to a psychiatric facility. When he was better, his parents refused to let him come home. He wound up in foster care and when his behavior became a problem, he was put into a long-term juvenile justice facility.

Children’s Rights is starting a national movement to make sure stories like Sam’s are heard and that across America we have laws and policies to protect the rights of LGBTQ youth.
Reforming Juvenile Justice

Mark – Age 16, Iowa

When he was 16, Mark ran into minor problems with law enforcement and spent a year at a boys’ detention center. Instead of learning, he spent most of his time in solitary confinement. That was the punishment for talking out of turn and not showering fast enough. The staff took his glasses, making him nearly blind. His claustrophobia made him afraid. His abuse made him angry. His loneliness made him depressed.

The solitary confinement of children takes an enormous toll on the physical and emotional well-being of young bodies and minds. Children’s Rights is on the front line of fighting to end this inhumane and illegal practice.
Standing Up for Immigrant Kids

Cristina – Age 3, Migrant from Honduras

Three-year old Cristina and her mother were fleeing from Honduras. Their home was violent and dangerous, and they wanted to be safe. When they crossed the U.S. border, Cristina’s weary mother begged for asylum. A border official instructed that Cristina be put in the back of a car. Then the car drove off into the night as her mother wept. Cristina and her mother were apart for more than two months.

Children’s Rights has taken a lead role in supporting federal and state lawsuits to reunite children cruelly separated from their parents.
Accessing Mental Healthcare

Raymond – Age 18, Iowa

Raymond, who suffers from debilitating mental illness, has been placed on suicide watch at least 27 times. He ties clothing around his neck and threatens to kill himself. He was restrained for 78 hours in a seven-month period. 67 of those hours were spent in a full-body restraint, often as punishment for self-harming behaviors. Raymond needs intensive therapy with a licensed practitioner. Instead, he receives short telephone sessions that do not follow the recommendations for his therapeutic needs.

That’s why Children’s Rights is fighting to make sure that Raymond and so many other vulnerable children have access to the mental healthcare services they need.
The stories of these children can’t be hidden anymore. The lives of more than half a million children are at stake. They are removed from abusive and neglectful homes, uprooted again and again, often with their life’s belongings stuffed into a trash bag. Powerless to advocate for themselves within a system that functions largely out of public view, they are America’s most vulnerable children. Their right to a safe and healthy childhood matters. Their right to an education matters. Their right to a fair shot at a decent life matters. They aren’t someone else’s responsibility; they are all of ours.
Every day, children are harmed by America’s broken child welfare, juvenile justice, education, and healthcare systems. Through relentless strategic advocacy and legal action, we hold governments accountable for keeping kids safe and healthy. Children’s Rights has made a lasting impact, protecting hundreds of thousands of vulnerable children and we are poised to help millions more.

They are depending on us... and you.

ChildrensRights.org

facebook.com/ChildrensRights

@ChildrensRights

@ChildrensRights