



As I sat in my room at the Iowa Juvenile Home in January 2006, I wondered about the direction of my life. I had worked hard during the last eighteen months, learning to control my anger and understand my behavior. Plans were being made for my discharge but my DHS worker said she couldn't find a foster home for me. I didn't want another foster home, I wanted to live with my birth mom, but they never listen to what I want. Right?

In February, I met my new foster mom and the other members of her family. It was quite overwhelming! Getting to know how this family worked, beginning visits with my mom, plus, scared to death this might not work and I'd be back in placement. Dealing with a new school, a busy schedule and a teen support group called Elevate. "You'll like it" they said, "We play games, act out skits and there's food!" Well if there's food....I guess... I'll go!

Little did I know that this group of strangers would become such a big part of my life and future. I was making friends with teens, who were in foster care, just like me. We were sharing about the excitement of visiting our loved ones or the sorrow of the court terminating our rights. They spoke about changing the system, making things better for others like us and getting our voices heard. I wanted to be a part of that, I had a lot to say and it was time the right people listened.

Next, it was time to tell my story; I'm not just a number from a file. When I talked about where I had been, I started to think, where do I want to go? Attend college, start a business, study photography....anything was possible. I could feel myself changing,

gaining confidence and learning from the people around me. It was affecting other Elevate members too, each time we spoke the size of the audience grew. New foster parents and social workers asked us how they can help. Adults were moved by our poetry and art, displaying it in calendars and on websites. We traveled around the state and to other states. Many of us had never been on an airplane! We made changes in the court system, the foster care system and this year in the education system.

Elevate spread through out Iowa and new chapters began to emerge. People heard us speak and said, “We need a group of our own”. Soon, wherever foster/adoptive teens live in Iowa they will have access to an Elevate chapter. With statewide funding, members can speak in their own communities to people who affect their lives directly. Each region can support and be proud of their youth while watching them blossom into the success stories of tomorrow.

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