

Fostering Great Ideas

Change the life of a child



Life Support: *Stories*

We began Life Support, our mentor program, in March, 2012. Stories are below, as told by the mentors.

Mentoring Is Truly Worth It

When my wife and I started with Fostering Great Ideas (FGI) two years ago, we each had a teen to mentor. However, her teen was quickly reunited with her mother. Because my teen was only four months away from his 20th birthday, she decided to join me as a co-mentor to him. We felt this was the right thing to do because we had so little time before he would age-out of foster care.

We quickly established rapport with him through frequent visits and outings. Because he only lived about 10 miles from us, we quickly began getting together with him twice-a-week. Although this was way beyond FGI's desire that we meet with our teen twice monthly, we felt that would not be enough time with him because of his age. He was emotionally younger than his years, thus the urgency for us to help him mature as quickly as possible. We usually got together with him for a couple of hours one night a week, and for most of the day on Saturday or Sunday. So, twice weekly outings became our routine.

With the consent of FGI, DSS and the group home, our weekend outings often included having him spend a day with us in our home, where we would share a meal, watch movies, and talk about his plans for his future. This quickly brought him to the realization that we didn't just see him as a duty or project; a feeling these teens often get because of their situations. We also allowed him to decide, within our small budget, where we would spend our time together.

If he learned nothing else from our time together, we wanted him to know we love him, and truly care about his future. When he reached his 21st birthday, he chose to reunite with his family, and moved 100 miles away to live with a family member. We've seen him a couple of times since and we still talk by phone. Although we didn't see this as the best choice, we did not disparage his choice or his family. We feel it's not our job to add to his stress and confusion, but just to love him and be there for him. Whenever we talk with him, we know that he is certain we love him, and that he can depend on us to be there for him.

While there were good times and bad, emotional highs and heartaches, we would not change a thing about our life with him. FGI brought us together in the hopes of helping him reach his potential as a person, and we did our best to facilitate that goal. We were strangers in March of 2012, now we feel he's part of the family.

To all who are considering becoming mentors, we encourage you to do so. While there are some great times, it's not all fun and games. It's a journey of two steps forward, one step back, and you will become the person he or she will count on. In the course of your relationship, your heart will soar and your heart will break. You'll be elated and frustrated. But it's all worth it to be a primary person your teen knows he can count on.

— *Mentor. April, 2014*

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Mentoring A Teen In Foster Care Is Anything But Dull

We have gone to court with our mentee. We've gone searching for him at night when he got mad and left his home. It didn't take us long to realize that behind that tough exterior is a scared child that is afraid of being alone. Despite his behavior we continued to persevere in guiding and directing him, trying not to be too judgmental. He did like having someone take him out of the home for a while. I guess you could say there were several months we just endured each other.

I've learned that a child in Foster Care spells love as T-I-M-E.

It was probably a year before we could start to see that the wall he had built up was starting to come down. Soon he was really listening when we would talk to him. Now he is even asking us for advice. Learning to be responsible is his biggest accomplishment. He realizes that he has to take responsibility for his actions. He is taking control of his future. After many failures in school we are celebrating his graduation in June and his future at Greenville Tech in the fall. We are so proud of him.

I believe we all would admit that we had feelings of hopelessness in the beginning. Today that hopelessness has turned to hope!

— Mentor. April, 2014



"I've learned that a child in Foster Care spells love as T-I-M-E."

Growing Pains and Making Gains

We began our mentor/mentee relationship from the start, with dinner two years ago. The 19 year old "boy" that I met had been in some form of institutional care since he was in middle school. It had been years since he spoke to a relative, so he felt abandoned. He was angry and prone to emotional outbursts. There were several occasions that he was hours away from being homeless and on the streets.

Over the two years I have seen him grow up considerably. He is holding down a job, and has an apartment that he is paying for on his own. He has established personal and financial goals, both short and long term. He has reached out to family and is beginning the long, hard road to establishing a relationship with them again.

It has been a rewarding experience for me, as a mentor, to see him get to a place where he has a chance to succeed. We see each other almost every week. Originally we would go bowling, go to a baseball game, or simply go out and grab an ice cream and talk. We have made dinners, and even gone out on a run. Now, because of his work schedule, we typically have to settle on having lunches together. I am listed as a reference on his applications, and as his emergency contact on his medical information. I have taken him to court, and taken him to doctor's offices. I have watched him succeed, and watched him fail. I guess I forgot how difficult it was to navigate the waters of early adulthood, and couldn't imagine trying to do it alone.

To be clear; it hasn't always been pretty. He has had emotional outbursts. At times he has not followed my counsel and gotten himself in trouble. He has had conflict with others and me. That said, he has certainly come a long way, and I believe I have been able to make an impact in his life. He now comes to me for advice, knows to call me before he does something dumb (most of the time), and often just calls to chat. Now, and for the past year, those meetings and phone calls always end in him saying, "I Love You." That is reward enough for me.

— Mentor. April, 2014

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