

Success Story: David's Bittersweet Discovery

The FFCR Review Specialist who participated in this CRP hearing shared this first-hand account.

David will turn 18 in two months. He walked into our review room with that disconnected "here we go again" look that most of our teenagers have when facing our panel or any hearing. Given that he would soon be 18, the panel had a lot of questions, which David answered openly and honestly.



"What are your plans after 18?"

His response: "I don't have a lot of answers to your questions but one thing I can say is I don't want to be in foster care anymore. I am not going into EFC [[Extended Foster Care](#) - now available to young adults ages 18 to 21 who meet certain qualifications]. I want to get my GED and live on my own. I have a job. I've raised myself and will continue to do so."

I took a deep breath and asked him, aside from not wanting to be in foster care, what other reasons he could give for not opting into EFC. He replied, "When you opt into EFC you have to stay until you're 21. I've been in foster care since I was four years old. Don't you think that's long enough? I know the benefits. You get your rent paid, allowance and therapy. I don't need therapy. I've had therapists my entire life. The minute you open up to someone, trust someone with your past, they leave you. What is the point? This system that you want me to stay in has ruined my life. My brothers and sisters were adopted. I was not. This system took everything away from me. I've lived in medical foster homes, foster homes and group homes. I'm tired."

His words resonated with me. I felt his sincerity, and the pain and frustration in his words. I would be tired too. David was right. This "system" had failed him. My panel grew silent. I looked around the room and noticed tears swelling in the eyes of volunteers. Before I could filter my words, I spoke. I told him he was right and I couldn't even begin to imagine the life he's had - the struggle, the broken promises, etc. But of all the things he said, he was wrong about EFC. You see, he had been given misinformation or misunderstood the requirements. I took the opportunity to explain that if he opts into EFC, the agency will assist him with transitional housing, which could be his own apartment or another approved living arrangement, pay his rent, and once he obtains his GED, then he can opt into the PESS program and enroll in post secondary education such as community college or vocational/trade school. His face lit up. This entire time, he was under the impression that EFC

meant he would have to live in a foster home until age of 21.

When the review was over, he shook each panel member's hand and thanked everyone for their time. I walked him out to the hallway and thanked him for coming. He looked at me and said, "Thank you for explaining things to me. I just want to make the right decision and have a real life."

In that moment I realized whatever we said to him had made a difference. I'm not the warm and fuzzy type but I took his hand and told him I believe he will make the right decision and that this was his life to live. He deserves every single benefit and opportunity available to him. We hugged. He put his earphones back on and walked away. I watched him walk down the hall until he turned the corner and disappeared. David is probably 6'2" and about 180 pounds, but in that moment it felt like it was 2001 and I was watching just another four-year-old boy walk down the hallway of the children's courthouse and I could not help but wish that were the case. There are so many things we as a system could have done differently.