

Abused children can't wait

At her first dental appointment, Gracie was so terrified she bit the dentist and gagged repeatedly. At her next appointment, she was seen in a hospital where she could receive anesthesia to alleviate her anxiety. Sarah was there at Gracie's appointments, offering her comfort and relief during a stressful time.

After six months of dental work, Gracie was finally out of physical pain and could confront her emotional trauma head-on. Gracie's mother had left Gracie and her three older siblings to raise themselves while she was doing drugs with friends and boyfriends in the house. Gracie and her siblings were not encouraged to go to school. They had never received haircuts or visited a mall. Instead, they were encouraged to use drugs, to skip school and dress provocatively, and they were allowed to be promiscuous in the home. They were not protected from sexual abuse from their mother's boyfriends. They were left to fend for themselves.

Today, the four siblings live with an aunt and uncle who bought a new house to accommodate the children. Through intensive counseling, tutors to bring them up to grade level and love, support and structure from their aunt and uncle, they've begun to live their lives as normal kids. They visit the doctor when they're sick, brush their teeth nightly and have curfews and appropriate boundaries. Sarah's advocacy didn't stop when Gracie's dental troubles were over. Sarah was able to contact officials who had issued truancy warrants for the children and have those warrants dropped now that they are in new schools and attending regularly. Sarah helped the aunt and uncle get access to food on a monthly basis that helps cover the bills. Sarah takes them to get haircuts, she took them to the mall for the first time and she even helped the family get a computer to help with the children's schoolwork.

But the thing the children wanted most of all, they have: a stable, loving, consistent home where they are safe.

"How long are we going to be here?" Gracie asked her caseworker just days after they were removed from their mother's care. "Because I would like to stay forever."

