

"All the days will get better."



As an adolescent, Demani Brown found herself on Juvenile Probation, wearing an ankle bracelet after a series of altercations with family members. "I did not care," is how she recalled this period in her life.

"I thought at 16, I was grown and knew everything."

Placement into foster care soon followed as did her pattern of behavior. A runaway, she was the subject of Silver Alerts issued by Law Enforcement. The Court lost patience and Demani was ordered into Detention. "For the two months I was there, I was losing my mind," she stated.

In Detention, Demani found out she was pregnant. "Scared," is what she remembers thinking. "Everyone gave up on me. I had to prove everyone wrong."

Enter Social Worker Valerie Tanner from the Department of Children and Families. "Who are you?" Demani remembers asking during their initial meeting. Valerie would engage with her and build that trust so often difficult to establish with adolescents. "I like your nails," Valerie told Demani. "A person like you shouldn't be in a place like this."

The relationship grew between the two strangers. "She saw something in me no one else did," is how Demani described their relationship. "She was there for me."

Demani flourished. She was an excellent student, a cheerleader and ran track. Those around her did not know she was pregnant. Despite medical complications resulting in a month-long hospitalization, and missing a total of 88 days from school, she graduated from High School at 17 years of age while living in a foster home and caring for her newborn son, Masai.

At 18 years old, Demani had her own apartment while raising her son. She received supports from DCF as a Transitional Aged Youth (TAY), and life seemed to be pointed in the right direction.

The intergenerational pattern of violence continued when she and Masai's father "got into an altercation," resulting in a report of child maltreatment. Her life changed.

"Masai needs to come into care," the DCF staff told her. "When I lost custody of my son, I lost my mind," Demani stated. "I went downhill for like 6 months. Nothing was the same anymore."



The journey towards reunification with her son was long.

"I stopped celebrating the holidays," she stated.

Demani never gave up despite the pain she was in and saw in her little boy. "Masai knew a lot, too much."

"I am alive and well. Why can't my son live with me?" she questioned.

In February 2022, Demani gave birth to her daughter, Loriana. She was medically complex and required two major surgeries. DCF closely supported and monitored Demani's progress and saw the attention and compassion she had as a mother. "DCF loved the way I cared for her," Demani stated.

Julie Dixon became Demani's Social Worker. They too formed a bond leading to great success! "It has been a delight to literally watch Demani grow up into the young woman she is today," Julie stated.

A plan was put into place to have Masai reunify with his mother and little sister. A special relationship was formed between Demani and Karen Swanson from r' kids Family Center in New Haven, a non-profit organization contracted by DCF to assist with an assessment and eventual plan for reunification.

They facilitated Demani's visits with Masai and offered suggestions and examples of the parenting style best for him. "They helped me transition into the mom I needed to be for Masai," Demani stated.

"If it wasn't for r' kids, Masai may not be with me."



At one point, Masai asked her, "Mommy, am I coming to your house?" "It is our house," she told him.

"I couldn't believe it," is what Demani thought when she was told reunification would occur.

A celebration - a "big, huge celebration" gaining over 500 likes on Facebook - occurred when Masai came home - and the family was finally together again.

"A feeling I thought I would never experience," is how Demani described that day.

"Demani has shown resiliency in the face of many challenges. She is funny and personable. "Demani's transformation from a rebellious young lady to the mom she is today, is impressive! She is an involved mom who seems to delight in her role as a parent. I am really proud of her," Julie added.

Demani's case with DCF is officially closed. For the first time in almost 8 years, she is free from DCF involvement either as a child or parent.

What would she say to others involved with the Department?

"Despite what is going on right now, don't give up," she stated. "Put yourself in DCF's shoes. How would you like to be approached? Change your approach to them and you will receive results."

At one point, Demani was resentful of the Agency's involvement. "I made the decisions that I made. Swallow your pride," she would tell others.

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