

Finding Her Voice: Cassiah's Journey from Silence to Empowerment at NYU



Cassiah's life changed forever at the tender age of eleven. With the sudden loss of her mother, she found herself thrust into a world of uncertainty and instability.

Temporary guardianship with her stepfather soon expired, and her biological father, who had promised to be there, never returned to renew it. Without a legal guardian, Cassiah entered the foster care system—a system that would shape her childhood and young adulthood in ways she could never have anticipated.

“When I first entered foster care, I didn’t know what to expect,” Cassiah recalls. “Being so young, everything was new and confusing. I didn’t fully understand what was happening.” The transition was far from easy. One of the biggest challenges she faced was feeling excluded from the decisions that profoundly affected her life.

“For many years, I felt like I had no control or say in what was happening to me.”

Cassiah had a 1.8 GPA in high school and felt discouraged and embarrassed. However, she felt inspired by her classmates who earned high grades and was determined to become a better student. Despite these challenges, Cassiah's resilience began to shine through. She learned to navigate the complexities of the foster care system, and over time, she discovered her strength and voice.

Today, at 24 years old, Cassiah is a testament to the power of perseverance. Personally, and academically, she is thriving beyond her wildest dreams. “I’ve become a better version of myself mentally, physically, and emotionally,” she says with a smile. “Academically, I’m doing better than I ever imagined. I’ve learned to not be too hard on myself and to always try my best.”

Cassiah's academic journey is inspiring. She completed her undergraduate degree in Healthcare Management at Norfolk State University as a first-generation college student. This sparked an interest in ensuring safe and effective healthcare policies. Now, she's pursuing a Nursing degree at New York University (NYU), driven by a deep passion for patient advocacy. “Everyone needs someone genuine who loves their job to be there for them in their most vulnerable moments,” she explains. “I want to be that person.”

College has been a transformative experience for Cassiah. It allowed her to break away from her past environment and find herself anew. “Being in college helped me grow mentally and create



a new outlook on life,” she reflects. “I’ve built connections with people who have helped me channel my true inner self.”



The Department of Children and Families (DCF) played a significant role in Cassiah’s journey, offering support that was both practical and emotional. “DCF granted me the opportunity to attend college out of state without worrying about tuition,” she says. “I connected with people who showed me I wasn’t alone. My worker and their team fought hard to ensure I received all the help I needed.”

Cassiah’s story is filled with key individuals who supported her along the way—past DCF workers, close friends, and family members who believed in her potential. Their unwavering support helped her overcome countless obstacles and stay focused on her goals.

One of her key supporters, Social Worker Laura Hudson, reflects, “Cassiah has been a pleasure to work with. When her social worker retired, I was excited to take over her case. She took advantage of all the services and opportunities afforded to her. Cassiah made up her mind that she would achieve all of her goals, and I am happy to see her accomplish them one by one.”

Beyond her academic and professional aspirations, Cassiah enjoys cooking as a hobby and loves pampering herself by getting her nails done. Despite her busy schedule, she takes life one day at a time and knows when to rest and pour into herself.

Cassiah’s aspirations are as noble as they are ambitious. She dreams of opening her practice as a Nurse Practitioner, a place where everyone, regardless of race or economic status, feels welcomed and cared for. “I hope to inspire others in similar situations by speaking to them, showing them that anything is possible when you believe in yourself and don’t give up.”

Her message to other young adults in foster care is one of hope and resilience. “Your story does not define you. Don’t give up on yourself—it gets better.” In fact, she delivered these powerful words at a recent Youth Advisory Board (YAB) meeting in the Norwalk Office attended by older youth in care as well as Commissioner Jodi Hill-Lilly and the Executive Team.



Cassiah also spoke at the Region 1 Foster Care Appreciation Banquet this past June in front of over 100 foster and adoptive parents, DCF staff and others.

Cassiah also hopes for broader changes in the foster care system. She advocates for including youth in their care plans, allowing them to feel part of the decision-making process. "I think society can better support foster youth with more programs for jobs, housing support, and community involvement," she suggests. Listening to the needs and wants of foster children, she believes, would make a significant positive impact.

Looking back, Cassiah is most proud of being a first-generation college student at NYU, accomplishing so much with little to no family support. Her growth and resilience are her biggest sources of strength.



"I stay motivated by reflecting on my progress and how far I've come," she says. "I know that no matter what challenge I face, things will work out for me."

As she steps into the next chapter of her life, Cassiah's hopes and dreams are clear. She wants to be a beacon of hope for those who feel hopeless, a voice for those in the foster care system, inspiring them to hold on and believe in themselves. "This is just a temporary chapter preparing you for greatness," she affirms.

Cassiah's journey from foster care to the light of empowerment is a story of resilience, hope, and unyielding determination. It's a story that will undoubtedly inspire many others to find their strength and believe in the promise of a brighter future.