

## **Antonio**

Hey what's up man, my name is Antonio AKA Loyalty. I'm 18 years old and I've been in care since I was about, 5 years old.

If I could go back, and tell myself something about when I first started going to court, it would be, to be prepared for anything. Court can be an intimidating and nerve-racking place. The representatives who are at court are there to support and guide you, like they've done for me. I have stuck with the people I trust. For me that was my Law Guardian, he is a great man with great listening skills.

There have been times that I have been at court waiting and have seen things that I didn't want to see or hear, like my mom being upset and people arguing over, what they wanted to do with me. I knew that I would be a'ight. Just as other youth will be as well, when they experience these emotions in court.

At first I was confused about the court process, but I continued to voice my opinion and kept asking as many questions as I could, until I understood what was going on. I spoke from my mind and especially my heart, which, I will continue to speak from. Court representatives have listened to me. I am my own man, with my own voice, and I will not allow it to be silenced. I have stayed involved in my permanency hearings. My law guardian has helped to make decisions about my future with my input, which is definitely important.

My first placement, I remember it being like a playground setting, there were a lot of kids laughing and having fun. I then got tired of playing and I wanted to go home. There was an uncomfortable silence around me. Then they began to explain, that I was going to be here longer than I thought. I cried the deepest river any boy could cry. The next few court appearances there were times, I felt hurt, because my mom wasn't at court and felt lost and scared, because she wasn't there to support me and my decisions about my future and I love my mom. I felt hurt, I also didn't like when the court staff were not all on the same page, about what was going to happen to me.

Even though all these years I've struggled, I have continued to keep a powerful attitude. I have kept in mind that these events have made me, a survivor and a soldier. I believe that everybody is dealt a hand; but it is truly how you play it, that counts. I feel like I have, and will continue to play the hand I was dealt, until I the day I pass.

My future plans, are to always be involved with music, I love to write, entertain and be an inspiration to all those youth around me. I also want to be an influence on those youth that are in a similar situations and truly work together to make the best, out of their situation.