

Charlie and Kelly

Kelly: Hi, I'm Kelly. I am 18 and a senior in high school. I will be graduating in June with Honors and I will be attending college in the fall with a major in early childhood education.

Charlie: Hi, my name is Charles, I am 20. I am a senior in high school. I will be done in June. I want to be a cook.

Kelly: Here's our story. Charlie and I were watching TV. The phone rings. It is our mom. Pack your bags. You are leaving.

That is how we entered foster care about five years ago. Charlie and I lived together for about three and a half years but now we currently live in two different foster homes.

Kelly: Three years after we entered care we actually went to court. We were confused and didn't understand what was going on. Who was making these decisions for us? How were they being made? And why weren't they asking us for our input?

Kelly: We had not been told why we were going to court or how to act, and we had no clue what was going to happen.

Charlie: It was scary

Kelly: During our first court appearance we had to wait about an hour and a half in the packed waiting room.

When our names were called, we walked into the court room, and sat in the back corner.

The judge spoke directly to the DSS representative using all kinds of legal terms that we didn't understand and then it was over.

We met our law guardian during our second court appearance. She introduced herself in one short sentence just before entering the court room. Then the judge asked her if she had met with us before today. She replied, "Yes, I have met with Charles and Kelly." We were shocked. Then the judge then asked us if we had ever met with the law guardian.

Charlie: I said yes.

Kelly: I said no. I told the judge that she had just introduced herself 5 minutes ago. If we weren't there, no one would have known. Four years later Charlie and I were asked to be on a panel of youth leaders to discuss our experiences with law guardians and how it affects the court process.

Kelly: On that day, our law guardian was in the audience. We were nervous that she was there. We did not want to single her out, but wanted to be honest. The statements we made had an enormous impact on our relationship. Now, our law guardian meets with us on a regular basis to explain what's going to happen in court. She makes sure that we know the who, the what, the where, and the when. She puts in the effort of getting to know us more.

The judge no longer takes part in the proceedings because we meet with a court referee. We have more of an opportunity to talk about our situation in court such as school, seeing siblings, aging out, and other things.

Charlie: Now, they know how we feel.

Kelly: Our advice is to take the time to get to know us, not just our case number.

Charlie: Don't just read our "brown folders."

Kelly: Please make sure we understand the big terms you say. Make sure we know what is happening.

Charlie: So this is our story.

Kelly: We appreciate your time and effort.

We hope you learned something. We don't want other youth to experience what we had to go through.