

Jocelyn

I am Jocelyn. I am 18 years old. I had no hope. I was angry with the world. I was depressed. I was sad. I was mad.

I have been in foster care for 3 years since I was 16 years old. Before I entered care, I was not aware that I was being placed in a place that was foreign to me. I didn't go to court initially. I was worried because I didn't know what was going to happen. My therapist told me I was going to be placed in foster care. I didn't even know a court system would be involved in a case like mine. I was feeling angry, sad and nervous.

When I first came into care, I didn't know that I would get a law guardian. I didn't even know what a law guardian was. Few weeks into my placement, a staff gave me a phone without saying who it was. When I asked her, she shrugged his shoulder in uncertainty. The man on the phone introduced himself as my law guardian and said that he was there to help me out. I was so excited because I thought he was going to take me out of my placement. Instead, he said that he was just there to represent me in court. I was so upset because nobody explained the court system to me.

When I found out about my first court hearing, I was told that I was not allowed to attend by my staff from my placement. I called my law guardian asking for me to be there. So for my next hearing, I was able to attend.

My first court experience was good. I felt like the judge listened to me, but after a few more times, not so much.

Now my law guardian always helps me out in understanding how the court works. He calls me a week before the permanency hearing and he's available whenever I need him.

One time I received a letter to attend my court hearing, but the information on the letter had many mistakes. I didn't want the paper defining who I am and I felt the need for the judges to know me for me and not what's on the paper. I didn't want the judges to get a wrong impression of me, especially being that it talks about my plan.

On another occasion, I went to court and found out something about myself that I didn't know. I asked questions about it but the judge and adults didn't explain it to me. They withheld information and brushed me off claiming that they didn't want to get me upset or set me off.

I sometimes feel like court is leaning towards what adults think should happen rather than my voice. I feel like I'm not being listened to at times. Sometimes I even feel that it's a waste of time but I'm glad that my law guardian always does a great job representing me. Even after all of this, I like attending court hearings because I can see what's going on and put my input in so that I won't have to worry about adults making decisions without me being there. I think this is a benefit.

I'd like for judges to ask me how I've been doing, how my placement is treating me, what I like to see happen as far as my plans and goals. I think that this would give me a chance to speak out and let the judges know how I'm feeling. The judges should ask questions directly to me rather than asking adults in my life how I'm doing. I would like to see the judges recognize that there is a need for youth to attend the court hearings. Judges should be supportive of youth being there and understand what youth in foster care are going through by listening to their stories.

I am Jocelyn. I am almost 19 years old. I am not angry. I am content. I want to go to college. I want to live on my own. I enjoy art and I want to pursue a career in art. My voice is important. I am hopeful. This is who I am.