

MY STORY AS A HOMELESS YOUTH By: SHALANE FOWLER

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My name is Shalane Fowler I am 20 years old and I have been homeless before. Life is truly hard when you are in a homeless situation with no one or nothing to turn to. I was 13 years old and ended up being placed in a DCF state care facility because I had developed a cutting problem because of the gay bashing in my home town and the homeless situation that followed did not help my growing process. Being in a placement was nerve racking enough with not knowing anybody but there was also no stability offered with having to be moved around all the time and having to settle your life somewhere else. Stability is a key factor in growing into an adult, so what happens when it isn't offered where you are being raised? I got out of placement 3 months before I turned 18 and I was told by my legal guardians that I had to be out the day of my eighteenth birthday because I made the choice not to go back into a placement after being in the state care for 4 years. I never got the chance to be a child and have fun and just grow up normally. I was forced to grow up at 11 when my mother was murdered. So between being in placement, raising your siblings and being homeless the day of your 18th birthday when do you have the childhood that everyone dreams of?

When I was homeless I was staying anywhere I could. I found myself jumping through friend's windows desperate for a meal and sleep. When you are young and go through traumas or life changing events and then have to deal with the stress of living on the streets it makes it so hard to better yourself for your future and to work past the things you have already gone through. I wish there were organizations out there when I needed them to help me get back on my feet. I am haunted everyday as an adult by my past and what I went through, putting my defense shield up everywhere I go, wondering am I going to end up on the streets if I live here or will I have food to eat? Being homeless traumatized me and it hurts wondering how many more youth are out there on the streets that are in the position I was once in, having to beg for food and shelter just for a night and scared about where to go and who to turn to for help. It is a hard situation that no one will understand unless they go through it themselves.

Last year I started dating an ex from when I was younger. Her family wasn't accepting of us dating when we were young and they weren't now that we were grown either. I was staying with her at her uncle's house and when he found out that I was the one that supposedly turned her gay we were both out on the street immediately. Sometimes we would get lucky and get to sleep on some ones floor but 99% of the time we were staying in her little car living out of a storage unit, no money, no food or drinks not eating or sleeping for days on end. And to top it off I was diagnosed with cervical cancer. I was living out of a car, going through chemo therapy, getting sick constantly, and unable to do much without help.

It was getting way too cold out and we had to resort to a homeless shelter. We were looked at oddly walking into a church as the scared lesbian couple. We stayed but only for a few nights because of the fear we had. Our families wouldn't help us not hers nor mine and we were stuck scared, sick, cold and hopeless. Being 18 years old might be the legal adult age but being that age you are still a youth, and being in an adult homeless shelter is terrifying at 18.

Throughout my life I have been homeless numerous times begging for shelter and food rarely ever having the luxury of help from so called friends and family, but when it was given it was highly appreciated. There weren't lot of places available or able to help either because there were no beds or they just didn't want to help. The fear running throughout my body and soul was terrifying being so young and realizing life isn't like a fairytale.