

## Samantha Scott-Murphy Speech

June 13, 2012

Hi, my name is Samantha Scott-Murphy. I am 21 years old and a high school graduate from Germantown High School. I currently work as a Youth Advocate in Juvenile Law Center's Youth Fostering Change program, which is a group of young people who have experience in the foster care system who work together to make change. I currently live in Northern Children's Services mother baby program with my son Zy'keem. Tonight, I am going to talk to you about how I got here today and offer some advice on how to face some of the challenges you might experience when you are growing up.

Growing up in the foster care system was tough. I spent almost all of my life in the child welfare system and away from my family. I didn't always feel like I was a part of the family that I lived with and felt like no one understood what it was like to be in foster care. I had a hard time concentrating in school and did not do well in my classes. My teachers would get angry that I didn't turn in assignments because I didn't understand them. They didn't know what I was going through back home.

However, one of my teachers was different than all the others. Her name was Ms. Hunt and she taught 8<sup>th</sup> grade English. She was different than other teachers because I felt like she really believed in me. I was very shy in class and she encouraged me to break out of my shell. She always encouraged me to write about my experiences and feelings about my life growing up. I wrote about things that meant a lot to me such as not having my mom around, the fire that happened in my foster home, and being separated from my brothers and sisters.

Writing became a way for me to express my feelings. For a long time, writing was easier than talking. It helped me figure out how I felt about my experiences in foster care and allowed me to talk about it to others. In middle school, I decided I wanted to tell my friends that I was in foster care so that they would better understand my situation. When I first told my friends, they felt sad for me and had a hard time understanding that I didn't live with my parents. But after a while they got used to it and it came up less and less. They reacted a lot better than I thought they would and I was glad that I told them because I felt like they supported me.

After middle school I came to Germantown High School. Those were the best four years of my life. I got to try new things like photography, theater, and modeling. I also joined a mentoring program in which young women got together and talked about the issues that were affecting us. Two older women ran the group and guided the conversation. We had open conversations about our feelings and it was nice to talk to other people about what we were going through. The students could relate to each other and talk about their feelings and had open discussions and even debates. Participating in these conversations and debates taught me to speak up and voice my own opinion. This program taught me to realize the importance of having a place to talk about the issues that you face. Talking about our problems allowed other people to understand and sympathize with each other.

Through high school, I learned that everyone has their struggles in life but you cannot let that stop you from succeeding. It's important not to give up and find ways that can help you better your situation. You should ask an adult for help if you need it. People want to reach out and support you, and it is important to let them help you. Don't push people away who are trying to help you—bring them closer to you. They are the ones who can help you deal with the obstacles you face.

After I graduated high school, I started working as a Youth Advocate for Juvenile Law Center. As a Youth Advocate I talk and write about my personal experiences in the child welfare system to lawyers, judges, and other people who work in the foster care system. I want them to know what foster care is really like so that they can understand what I went through. I want them to hear the good parts to know what works well but also the bad parts to know what needs to be changed so that other young people in foster care do not have to go through what I did. By speaking out and talking about my experiences, I feel like I have the power to change things.

Today, I live in Northern Children's Services mother baby program. When I first came to Northern Home it was shaky and I didn't feel like I was at home. I wasn't used to the environment where you had to share a room and have a curfew. But then, I started to get used the rules and it grew on me. It's more stable and safe than anywhere else my son and I could have gone. The staff have been really helpful in talking to me when I need someone to talk to and making me and my son feel comfortable in our new home. It's been a good place to raise my son because he is safe and there are other children for him to play with.

As for my future goals, I want to get a college degree in psychology and work as a peer specialist, which is a counselor for people who need help. I know that there will be many challenges to getting this degree. However, I know that if I seek out the support I need that I will be able to get to my goals. I know that no one is able to succeed on their own and we all need help some time. So I hope that you all remember to always ask for help!

Congratulations on your awards and enjoy the rest of your evening.