

ANTONIO'S STORY

My name is Antonio and I am currently 18 years old. I grew up in a rough neighborhood in Lawrence with my parents and three siblings. I witnessed a great deal of violence and drug abuse both inside my home as well as out in the community. As far back as I can remember DCF has been a part of our lives. I recall being evicted from our family home on numerous occasions and being bounced around from place to place. My mother was really struggling with substance abuse and DCF finally became our guardians. Although some things were better for us, it was really hard because all of my siblings were not able to be together. Despite being separated we still remained close because we went through so much together as a family.

Unfortunately, I found myself living in a DYS lock up facility when I was fifteen. This really scared me, but I did what I needed to do and was fortunate enough to earn an interview at Family Continuity's SAIL Program. Thankfully, I was accepted shortly after my sixteenth birthday. Now I just needed to convince the principal at Beverly High School to give me a chance despite my background. My hopes were really high as my goal was to join the BHS basketball team. Basketball is my passion and it has been a great outlet for me since I was young.

Principal Gallagher gave me the chance to attend BHS with the condition that I become part of the ROTC Program and check in with the Major every morning. Even though I didn't want to do this I did so because I desperately wanted to play basketball for BHS my junior year.

So, life was going good for me, as smooth as I can remember. I had a lot of support at SAIL and built strong relationships with the staff. I made friends at school and with the guys on the team and felt good about myself. I am proud of the fact that I never got involved with using drugs and alcohol even though my peers were. My family history always remained fresh in my head and I knew it was a dead end road.

Although, I have had my ups and downs, the SAIL team never gave up on me and even advocated for me to come back to the program when I screwed up. I am so grateful because I was really struggling and started to slip in school and began skipping class. I was living in an apartment setting and didn't have enough support to help me day to day. It made me realize how well the staff at SAIL knew me. Sometimes I say that everything is going ok, but the staff at SAIL could see through that and would check-in with me, call my guidance counselor, teachers and basketball coach. I know they really cared about me and were invested in my future. My time away from SAIL was very rocky and my grades suffered a great deal. It made me realize all the support I had and needed in order to be successful.

I am pleased to share my senior year was better than I ever expected. My basketball team made the tournament; I completed my senior requirements, received the principal's award at the senior banquet, was asked by the principal and Vice principal to

give the invocation speech at graduation and walked away with a high school diploma and scholarship to boot.

Graduation day was one of the proudest moments of my life and my family and SAIL staff were there to support me and applaud my success. I am grateful for all the opportunities that have been given to me even though I may not have deserved them. I am most proud of the fact that I don't use drugs and alcohol as I have directly seen how this has torn my family unit apart. Thankfully we remain close as siblings and I am hopeful that this closeness will grow with shared good times as opposed to pain and hardship.

I am bit nervous about what path to take next as I have a lot of interests. I have been accepted to North Shore Community College and am thinking of pursuing a criminal justice degree, but am also looking into becoming a barber through The New England Hair Academy. Who knows, maybe someday I will be a police officer and own my own barber shop. Why limit yourself. You got to dream big right? I could not have made this journey alone and now I know with help I can accomplish what may seem impossible.

To find out more about the SAIL program and other services that Family Continuity provides in your community to youths like Antonio, or how you can help, contact us at (866) 219-3320, or on our web-site at www.familycontinuity.org.