

“I learned that I wasn’t alone”—YWCA’s NIA Program Offers Inspiration, Housing and Support for Former Foster Youth

Provided By YWCA Greater Cleveland

Each year, about 200 teens age out of foster care in Cuyahoga County. Many find themselves suddenly on their own, with no job, nowhere to live, limited life skills, and little hope for the future. Within four years of leaving the foster care system, 24% of young adults have been homeless. Nearly half of young women in foster care have been pregnant by the age of 19 and nearly 25% will become homeless by age 22.

Asia was one of these vulnerable teens, at risk to become a statistic. Asia spent 16 difficult months in foster care, and by age 17 had transitioned out of the system. Her next move was uncertain. “I was pretty much the stereotype of a foster child—I had a messed up attitude,” said Asia. Her social worker referred her to YWCA Greater Cleveland, where she enrolled in NIA, Nurturing Independence and Aspirations, a program which provides education, job readiness training, and life skills to former foster youth. A single mom, Asia also benefited from the parenting skills training offered through NIA, where she learned what to expect during pregnancy and how to care for her son.

“First I learned basic skills, like how to cook and make doctor’s appointments. Later I learned about relationships, and how to avoid getting into bad ones, how to fill out job applications, where to look online for jobs, and how to interview,” Asia said. “The NIA program at the YWCA really helped prepare me to live on my own, be a good parent, and become an adult.”

NIA is one of several core programs the YWCA Greater Cleveland has created to fulfill the critical needs of the community. Building on the success of its NIA program, YWCA Greater Cleveland developed Independence Place, a permanent supportive housing facility for homeless young adults. Asia and her 10-month-old son Nehemiah moved into Independence Place in January, and continue to take advantage of YWCA services, including the Early Learning Center, which provides high quality early education for children ages six weeks to five years. It is one of the region’s premier providers of early childhood education, meeting the needs of both children and parents at a convenient and secure location.

Though Asia has seized many opportunities arising from YWCA programs, the most important lesson she received didn’t come from a curriculum book. “I learned that I wasn’t alone. I met other girls who had come from foster care and I realized that we are all the same inside, you just never really know what someone’s background is.” This sense of unity is at the heart of YWCA Greater Cleveland’s mission to eliminate racism and empower women. Because of the commitment and generous support of the community, lives are being forever changed.

SHE COULD BE A HOMELESS MOM WITHIN FOUR YEARS

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NIA

(Nurturing Independence & Aspirations)

is a program of **YWCA Greater Cleveland** providing services, support and inspiration to girls and young women ages 15-24 who are transitioning out of foster care.

DONATE NOW:

www.ywcaofcleveland.org

Your gift will provide critical support to vulnerable youth.

NIA services include:

- Educational support
- Career preparation
- Life skills training
- Nurturing parenting instruction
- Life coaching

**eliminating racism
empowering women**

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