

FRIENDS of the CHILDREN

Generational Change,
One Child at a Time

Boston



Good evening. My name is Javier, and I am the father of Jaylan*. He is 11 years old and he's just like all of the boys his age. He loves video games, movies and spending time with his mentor, Andre. Jaylan has the best laughs and he is a great kid. We have a good time together and I am so proud of him.

I grew up in Roxbury, not far from Friends' office. Growing up, I didn't always do the right things. But I knew that I had to turn my life around when I found out I was going to be a dad. Even though I was trying my best, things didn't go our way. Jaylan's mom struggled, and Jaylan was put in foster care when he was only 4 years old.

They put him in so many different foster homes when he should have been home with me. For seven years, I showed up, did the right things, worked hard at my job, but I still could not convince them that I am capable of taking care of my son. I went to meetings and hearings, and judges would say my son should come home with me. But months would go by and nothing happened.

They gave me one hour every week to see him, and I didn't miss one visit. At one point, they moved him to Lowell which is two-hour away. I would take the bus, and then walk another 30 mins from the bus station so we could be together. It would take me many hours to go back and forth just to spend one hour with him, but there was no way I would miss the chance to see Jaylan.

For the last seven years when I was fighting for my son, Friends-Boston was there for him. They worked with us when he moved from foster home to foster home. His mentors showed up every week to make sure that Jaylan had another adult who would be there for him no matter what. Jaylan's mentor, Andre, played an important role of supporting us last year. He came to my DCF meetings and court hearings. Andre helped the judge and DCF workers understand that I will do a good job and he will be a partner to support Jaylan and I. I trust Andre to take care of my son and to be a friend to me. Because of Andre's help, Jaylan finally came home after 7 years in foster care.

He is my son, we are learning more about how to live with each other as a family. Things are not always easy. After so many years of being in foster care, Jaylan really struggles with his behaviors and being scared of a lot of things. I learn to sit with him to comfort him, and to assure him that I will protect him. I will never let anything bad happen to him. Being a single parent, I am taking care of my son 24-7. When his mentor, Andre, comes to see Jaylan every week, it gives me time to breath and catch up. Friends of the Children is like a part of my family. They even took our first father-son family photos.

I want my son to know that I will always be there for him. There are people out there who don't think single fathers take care of their children. That is not true. I do the right things everyday because that is what Jaylan deserves. I want him to get good grades in school and get a good job. I know Andre and Friends will be there for us and make sure we succeed. Thank you for being here to support Friends of the Children. They are helping to change the lives of many children and families like me. Thank you.

**name changed to protect the identity of the child*