

MEET KENDRA



Kendra is a 16-year old female who entered foster care at age 1 and has been moved to a total of 17 foster homes, group homes, juvenile shelters, and residential treatment facilities in her young life. She has attended schools in 9 different towns, leaving behind friends, belongings and connections with each move. Kendra is in a special education therapeutic school to address her learning disabilities and educational gaps. She has medical problems that include depressive mood swings and seizures.

CASA of Morris and Sussex Counties assigned Lori, a trained volunteer, to advocate for Kendra’s best interests; to ensure that she received appropriate educational and medical resources; and to advocate for her placement in a safe, nurturing home, as soon as possible.

Other than Lori, Kendra had no stable, reliable adults in her life. **Lori became the person who Kendra trusted and reached out to when she was upset and needed someone to listen to her.** Kendra became very comfortable with this CASA volunteer and expressed her concerns regarding her foster placement, her educational struggles, and her conflicting issues with her sexual orientation.

Through CASA’s Family Search and Connect (FSC) Program, a second CASA volunteer, Donna, was assigned to complete an extensive search of the many volumes of Kendra’s history at the Department of Child Protection and Permanency’s (DCPP) office. Donna found several relative’s names and after internet searches, letters, phone calls, and visits, a maternal aunt who had not been involved in Kendra’s life for over 10 years was identified as a connection for Kendra. The aunt was vetted by DCPP, and a visitation plan was created with Kendra’s input for an initial visit.

The two CASA volunteers worked collaboratively with the DCPP Case Worker for several months to monitor progress of continued visits that were extended to weekends and to assess Kendra’s comfort level through discussions with her therapist. The relationship between Kendra and her aunt strengthened, and a permanency plan to have Kendra live with her aunt on a full-time basis was put in place. After 17 different placements, Kendra was adopted by her biological aunt. She now has an extended family of relatives in her life and a place to belong. **Kendra’s CASA volunteers advocated for her to receive education resources and therapeutic services to be in place after the adoption. Kendra’s self-confidence is building, as she finds her way towards long term stability. It is because of two CASA volunteers that Kendra has a better tomorrow.**