

Being Happy—in Spite of Rejection by My Birth Family for Being Gay

Tobias Rogan

From my birth, being gay has been against my family's way of life. Because of my family and their religious views, my journey through the foster care system began at the young age of 12. When my family disowned me for being gay, I was completely side-struck. I felt I was alone. I believed that I was the only gay kid around. I now am openly gay and happy with life. But it wasn't easy getting to this point.

Growing up in care in our society can be a struggle. Being of the LGBTQ community while *also* being in care makes it an even greater challenge for a young person. I know it was for me. I had many challenges while being in care and being gay. I didn't know where to go to find resources; I felt I didn't have any supportive adults; and my relationships always seemed to fail.

Growing up in the system, the importance of equality and being treated equally would have helped me more than anything. Many times I felt alienated.

On numerous occasions I was treated differently from my peers. Many LGBTQ youth in care feel that they are being treated unfairly. Having adults who can simply be the support that we need, no matter who we are, is extremely important.

For CASA volunteers, it's vastly important to understand the needs of an LGBTQ youth. It's very common that gay or transgender youth in care have been exposed to some form of sexual abuse. You should take

into consideration the importance of the young person's voice. Ask yourself this: Would a youth be comfortable in a specific situation? For example, in an all female or male setting? In a single-parent home? In an independent living program? Personally being placed into many group homes, I felt unsafe because of my history of abuse. I know that a CASA volunteer would have helped me "amplify my voice" to let my needs become heard.

Because I unfortunately did not have a CASA or a specific supportive adult when I had times of struggles and abuse, I had to become very "head smart" in life. I constantly kept to myself, isolated from the world around me. I looked up to certain people. Whether it was someone real or fictional in my life, I looked up to many, many adults. In my mind I kept telling myself that I was going to be a better person.

I know from experience that being in the system is tough, especially being LGBTQ. I had to become a positive person. But becoming that positive and successful person wasn't easy. I had to be resourceful and find the help that I needed. There were plenty of websites, organizations and other resources that I constantly looked up for advice, optimism and hope. Some of those were books! I read books very often to have a sense of freedom from my reality. I read to "get away." One of the ways I did find hope was through the YouTube website, where basically anyone can upload and share videos on any

topic. Whenever I needed an answer or some form of advice, I went to YouTube. I was able to hear personal stories and advice from people my own age, from around the world. It gave me hope that one day I would become happier.

Years later, I am a *happy individual*. It took a lot of self-help, research and reaching out, but I am proud of the person I have become.

Currently I am enrolled in college full time. I am in my junior year, and I participate in the campus color guard. I am double-majoring in social work and film and media studies. I want to take my skills and talents working with the media to help the foster care system and advocate for those in care—especially those who are LGBTQ. I also am the 2009–2010 FosterClub All-Star Michigan representative. FosterClub gives me the opportunity to help the system and advocate for young people in foster care. Because let's face it: Who's going to make a change if we don't step up to the plate? 🗣️

Tobias Rogan, 19, was selected through a competitive national application process to serve as one of 12 FosterClub All-Star interns. The All-Stars travel the country motivating and informing their peers, providing child welfare professionals with the perspective of youth and raising public awareness. To learn more, visit fosterclub.com. Tobias studies at Western Michigan University. He is also a photographer and provided the self-portrait above.

