



Former foster kids sought to help others avoid anguish

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Christa Drake knows how it feels to score a goal and not have anyone watching at the sidelines.

So does Eshawn Peterson.

Both Tucson women were once foster children who faced many triumphs and challenges alone. Now, their work through an organization called In My Shoes is dedicated to sparing other teens and children the heartache they endured.

In My Shoes, a member organization of Arizona's Children Association, is working to recruit former foster children to mentor teens in foster care, particularly during their transition to independent living. Their campaign is called Will You Be There?

There are more than 10,000 children living in foster care in Arizona, and about 2,400 live in Pima County.

Peterson, 24, started volunteering as a mentor with In My Shoes in 2007. She has since mentored three teens, finished her bachelor's degree in Africana Studies and psychology and is now the program coordinator for In My Shoes.

"It's been amazing. The challenge is really meeting them where they are at," she said, adding she's been amazed at their resilience. "They prove you wrong time and time again."

Peterson said she was one of six children in her foster home, and her foster parents had little time to spare.

"I knew what it felt like to have no one there and it's one of the worst feelings in the world, to have all these people around you and feel like you're alone," said Peterson, who is now earning her MBA on scholarship at the University of Phoenix.

Drake, one of the founding members of In My Shoes, said the organization helps about 300 to 500 foster children and teens each year in various ways.

"I urge people to remember the experience of aging out of foster care and not having someone there," said Drake, 32. "Simply by being there, you can make a huge difference."

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