Living in an Inspired World: Voices and Visions of Youth in Foster Care

Edited by Dr. Monique B. Mitchell
Dr. Monique Mitchell is dedicated to serving children and youth in foster care. She devotes her time to nurturing the lives of children and youth involved in the child welfare system. Because Monique has firsthand experience with many of the challenges youth in foster care face, she is able to empathize with and help empower youth. As a mentor to youth and young adults with foster care experience, she promotes the power of inspiration, compassion for yourself and others, and the importance of meaningful relationships. If you ask Dr. Mitchell what inspires her the most, she will tell you “Love.” And her life’s work is proof of that answer.

When she was very young, Dr. Mitchell wanted to be a magician—but as she grew up she realized she wanted to wield a different kind of magic as an educator and advisor. Since then Dr. Mitchell has been invited all over the world to educate others about the lived experience of children and youth; she is honored and humbled to inspire the world with the voices of children and youth in foster care.

In addition to this title, Dr. Mitchell is the author of the renowned book *The Neglected Transition: Building a Relational Home for Children Entering Foster Care* (Oxford University Press). Her work has appeared in journals such as *Children and Youth Services Review, Child and Family Social Work, Child and Adolescent Social Work Journal,* and *Journal of Social Work.*

For more information on Dr. Mitchell, please visit her at moniquebmitchell.com.
This book was written for

You — yes, YOU!

Why? …

Because you matter,
because we care,
and
because the voices and visions of youth
can inspire the world.
A MESSAGE FROM THE EDITOR:

“

What advice would you give a youth who needs inspiration?” This question was posed to more than 200 youth, ages 20 and 21, with foster care experience who participated in the Voices and Visions of SC Youth in Transition study. These youths’ insightful responses speak to their resilient, supportive nature and their desire to facilitate meaningful change in others’ lives. These inspirational quotes are filled with the wisdom and positivity that youth in foster care need and deserve. How can these messages find their way from the hearts of youth with foster care experience to youth in foster care across the nation? The answer rests in the voices and visions of youth themselves.

Drawing from the data acquired from the Voices and Visions of SC Youth in Transition research study, Living in an Inspired World: Voices and Visions of Youth in Foster Care consists of 365 days of inspirational messages for youth throughout the world. The intention of this book is to affirm that youth in foster care, and all youth, are competent, capable catalysts of change. Most importantly, we are reminded that we can be masters of our own destiny and that inspiration can lead the way.

A MESSAGE FROM THE STUDY’S YOUTH ADVISORY PANEL:

As advisors, we value a book that helps or inspires others and shares the perspective of other youth who are in foster care. The book was inspired by the negative comments about youth in foster care that often made us feel accused and unworthy. We want to change young people’s ideas and perspectives about being in foster care and present an opportunity for them to recognize something in themselves that is already there but that they may not easily see.

Simply put: Youth in care don’t want someone to just say, “I know how you feel,” without having the experience to really understand how they feel. We want someone who can relate to us. While there are similar books out there, this is the only one that we know of that is written by youth in particular and provides inspirational quotes from youth in foster care for youth in foster care. This book represents not only young people’s voices, but their visions for what the world could be.

There are a number of people we have to thank for being able to develop this book: youth who took the surveys, facilitators who share the research findings with us, case managers and caregivers who encouraged and supported youth in taking the survey, and the research team who asked the youth inspirational questions. The book we have created represents the true experience of youth in foster care. It is an important book not only for youth in care but as a resource for case managers, teachers, caregivers, mentors, counselors, foster parents, and anyone that is going through something difficult or needs inspiration throughout their day. The book sends a message of hope filled with positivity to hopefully uplift youth in foster care and anyone who may need inspiration.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book was influenced and developed by many, many people.

First and foremost, a heartfelt thank you to the youth and young adults who shared their voices to make this possibility become a reality. Without your wisdom, courage, and inspiration, this book would not be possible. Thank you to all of the youth who participated in the Voices and Visions of SC Youth in Transition research study, the youth advisors of the research study’s advisory panel (SC NYTD Youth Voice), and the South Carolina Department of Social Services state youth advisory board (Go Out and Learn Life, GOALL). Your voices and visions will continuously inspire youth for days, months, and years to come!

A special thank you is extended to all those who invested their time, energy, skills, and resources to ensure that this book and research study could be brought to light and enhance the lives of children and youth in foster care and youth throughout the world. This includes, but is not limited to, the South Carolina Department of Social Services; the Center for Child and Family Studies in the College of Social Work at the University of South Carolina; the Child Welfare League of America; The Enhancing Life Project funded by the John Templeton Foundation; the study’s research associates and program coordinators (Toni M. Jones, Louisa H. Vann, Tessa Adams, Misa Alquicira, Sara Underwood, Faith Davis); the South Carolina Department of Social Services Independent Living Program staff (LaToya Reed, Terri Pope, Mari Squire, Erica Bowman, Michael Voncannon, Patrice White, Kaneshia Greene); graduate research assistants (Tracey Beecken, Ethan Fogus, Amanda Denson, Chris McKethan, Lori Michell, Jill Biskup, Danielle Terry, Ashley French, Lee Fletcher, Melissa Dugan, Tarryn Parker, Emily Flores, Darlene Jones, Zhaoxia Guo, Alison Brown, Sarah Renema, Jessica Ashlee, Erin Bourgeois, Julia Peay, Karo Omodio, and Nishant Karasala); SCDSS regional and county directors and case managers; foster parents and the South Carolina Foster Parent Association; group home staff and the Palmetto Association for Children and Families; and all other community partners.

With continued collaborative partnerships, and investment with and in the lives of children and youth in foster care, inspiration blossoms and lives are transformed.
“Every day is a new day.”
Find something that re-fires your life. Find... do something. I’m sure something will spark your interest. You’ll find it. You just have to look.”
“Live, love and forget.”
"Keep your head up and just do what you gotta do."
“If you don’t try, then you’ll never know if you can.”
“Be humble. It’s not an easy role, but you are going to get through it in due time.”
Believe in yourself and know that you can do it."
“Find something you Love to do.”
In order for it to work you have to believe in it.”
“If Martin Luther King stopped, would we be living Together as one race?
All you have to do is lead and you will receive.”
“Turn to someone you can trust, someone you can talk to, and let them know how you are feeling.”
“Look toward your future.”
“I Can do this.”
“Life is worth living. Make sense of it all.”
You can achieve anything that you put your mind to.
National Freedom Day

January 31

February 1

“Your future is up to you.”
“Look beyond now.”
“If you want to do something, go for it.”
You have to look at the blessings you have. You just have to think, What are the positive things that are happening? When you start thinking positively, life goes a lot better.
“All it takes is a smile to change your world.”
“Always stay strong, no matter what you’re going through.”
Anything is possible.
Listen to your heart.”
“Everything you need you already have within yourself.”
Pursue something."
“As long as you have Determination and heart, then anything’s possible. You control the outcome.”
You have to keep pushing and keep moving. Everything will be brighter on the other side."
“Stay positive.”
“Pray every night and keep faith.”
Create goals and work hard to achieve them.
“It’s okay to look for Hope and guidance if you need it.”
There’s always somebody out there for you.”
Breathe and be calm.
There is hope everywhere.

“

MARCH 9

There is hope everywhere.”
Smile and be Happy.

“Smile and be Happy.”
“Stay focused.”
“Everything is going to be okay.”
Be thankful for life and stay motivated."
“Find something that you love and let that grow. Make that your inspiration and work at it.”
International Day of Happiness

March 20

March 21

“Be yourself.
There’s no one like you.”
“Live, learn, and love.”
Keep faith. Good things will come to you.”
Life may seem rough, but if you just hold on to hope, you will strive.”
March 28

Take it day by day.”

March 29
March 31

“The light will always shine the brightest.”
Do whatever you need to do to make yourself feel good, because once you feel good about yourself, you can do anything.”
"If you put it in your mind that you can face it and you can beat it, then you’ll beat it."
Keep your head up, stay strong and don’t give up because God hasn’t given up on you.”
World Health Day

April 7

April 8

“Live well.”
"Look within yourself. Realize what the good qualities are and put them to use."

April 10
See what you want to do.
Believe in miracles.
Inspiration is all around you.
Everybody goes through something in their life. It’s hard, but you will make it!”
"It all starts Within."
You have many talents.”
“Find the good ways to solve problems.”
Hold on. It’s going to be alright. It may seem rough right now, but there’s always going to be a ray of light.”
“Stay strong.”
"Don’t worry — be happy because the sun always shines in the morning."
May 1

May 2

“Hope for the best.”
Try to be a better person.”
Pick yourself up and keep working on what you’re doing because something is always better than nothing in life.”
“Right when you are about to give up is when the blessings come.”
“You can do anything if you put your mind to it.”
Keep a positive attitude about everything."
“Things will get better.”
“Find someone you can believe in and talk to them.”
Show the World that you’re better than what they say you are.
Never give up.
At the end of the day, there is always something better coming.”
“Take the good and the bad as a blessing and move forward.”
“Always keep your mind focused.”
“Have hope and believe.”
You can’t unless you try."
“Accept what’s going on, even if it’s not your fault, because then you can move on and learn how to learn from it.”
“Find things that make you happy and do them.”
"Keep your head up and always move forward."
I’ve been there.
I’ve been in the system.
When you feel like no one else in the world cares,
remember me. I care.”
“Strive for your goals. Stay on the course that you want.”
“Someone out there believes in you.”
June 10

Stay around positivity.

June 11

“Stay around positivity.”
It’s not too late to continue where you left off and accelerate in life.”
“As long as you are alive there is always hope. Find it, hold onto it, and never let go!”
Everyone has a purpose on this earth. Everyone has a reason.”
"After every dark night, there’s a brighter day."
Look at yourself.
You’re strong.
You’re here.
You made it this far.
You can make it anywhere.”
“Take life slow, one step at a time, every day.”
“Believe. Think about how you want your future to be so you can make that happen.”
Count on yourself and motivate yourself to do better."
“The only way life can put you down is if you let it.”
Look within. You have made it through these things, gone through this and that, and made it through. You are strong."
“Know who you are. Keep faith.”
Live happy.

Independence Day

JULY 4

“Live happy.”
“Find someone that you can confide in.”
“Never give up, no matter how hard it is, or how long it takes you, because once you finally get what you’re trying to achieve, it’s going to be a good feeling.”
July 10

Hold on. Tomorrow’s a brighter day and everything that you’re dealing with doesn’t last forever.”
“You have to go through the bad times to get to the good times.”
“Keep thinking of the good things and you will go through life a little brighter each day.”
“Find that one inspiration that you need to succeed in life.”
“Don’t focus on the past, don’t worry about the future, just focus on the present.”
“Find something that you’re passionate about.”
It’ll be Alright.

“"It’ll be Alright."
“No matter what you go through, keep faith and believe.”
“You can do anything you want to in life.”
“Be positive and positive things will happen to you.”
“Someone out there will always care.”
“Find inspiration within yourself.”
“Stay strong no matter what you’re going through.”
Be thankful for what you have.
August 7

Happiness Happens Day

August 8

“There’s always an end to the sadness, depression, and anger.”
“Set a goal and strive for it.”
There are things that make it harder and things that make it easier. Keep going no matter what.
“Rise above everybody’s expectations.”
“Everybody has to walk through a storm before they get to the rainbow.”
August 17

Keep hope.
Have faith.”
“Look on the positive side of things. You only live once.”
“Keep your head up and stay strong, and no matter what, strive for your dreams.”
Never give up on yourself. Never turn your back on yourself and never lose hope.”
“Guide your hope. Build it back up.”
You can do something.
You can become something.
Just let everything go.
Just keep moving.”
You can accomplish any obstacle that you come across.

"You can accomplish any obstacle that you come across."
“Keep pushing. Keep moving forward.”
Try not to be a statistic based on what others say. Be what you know you can be.”
“Everything happens for a reason.”
“Strive for success.”
Better days are coming.”
People say that you only live once—but you only die once. You live every day. Make your life have meaning."
If you feel some type of way, just write it down. It relieves stress.”
Who would you be molded into if you didn’t have problems? You can either let problems make you or break you.”
Keep your head up and take it day-by-day.
“Find something that inspires you.”
Always have a positive mindset."
“Don’t let your past haunt you. Your past made you who you are; if you don’t like it, change the present, because soon it will be your past.”
Take it one day at a time."
When you look at life it comes down to two things: How much do you want change, and how much are you willing to change what’s around you so that you can make that change happen?”
Have faith and try to do better for yourself. Your hope will start getting stronger and everything will get better.
Keep a smile on your face, no matter how bad times get.”
“Keep trying. Life will get better.”
You’re not out there by yourself.”
“Whatever you do, be positive.”
“There is always some type of hope.”
Life is like a game of chess. Plan your life strategically and always pick yourself back up."
You are who you choose to be. It’s always your choice.”
Stay focused when it gets hard. It gets better.”
Everything happens for a reason. Don’t give up.”
"Your dreams can come true."
Keep faith and hope in your heart that you’ll understand.”
“Stay strong and think positive.”
There’s always a good and a bad.

There’s no reason to give up.”
You may feel like you’re alone in life, but you’re not. God is always going to be there for you through every single thing you go through.”
“The only person who can hold you back from life is yourself.”
“Have a Superman outlook on life.”
D on’t rely on time. Keep going in life.”
“Once you’re at the bottom, there’s nowhere to go but up.”
“Everything can be regained—you just gotta find a reason.”
“Find someone to inspire you.”
It only gets harder before it gets better. You have to make it through the worst so you can get to the better.”
You are not alone.
The night turns into day.
It always gets darker before it gets brighter."
November 15

Find something that you enjoy and stick with it.”
“Keep moving forward regardless of the outcome of every situation you come across.”
“With every small challenge comes an even bigger one… that should be an inspiration to make you want to do more.”
“Do not give up. Somebody out there will notice.”
“Look at your past and look at where you are now. Look forward to what else is to come.”
November 25

Be thankful for life.

November 26

“Be thankful for life.”
You have a reason for existing. You need to set a goal and find something to look forward to. Find happy people to be around and really make the best of your situation.”
Never stop believing.
“Find something that motivates you.”
There’s always a light at the end of the tunnel.”
No matter what you’re going through, there are always going to be better days.”
Hold your head up and put a smile on your face because things are going to get better.”
December 9

Human Rights Day

December 10

“Be happy to be you.”
“Don’t try to do everything on your own. We are all human and we need help from time to time.”
Stay true to yourself.
December 15

You’re going to come out of it. You’re going to be ten times stronger. I guarantee you, because that’s what’s going to build you.”
“Stay motivated.”
Stay positive and keep positive people around you.”
Go down your own path and follow your own dreams. Be your own person.”
God always puts a person in your life for a season, a reason, or a lifetime.”
“Life is full of surprises.”
No matter how alone you are, or how alone you feel, there is somebody in the world for you.”
“Don’t give up. There is always more out there than you know.”
DECEMBER 31

New Year’s Eve

JANUARY 1

“‘It’s never too late.’”
May I …

(A Daily Affirmation)

May I love myself completely
May I not be afraid of change
May I always remember my gifts
May I love without boundary

May I grow in conviction
May I feel truth beyond words
May I be compassionate to those around me
May I remember the truth of life

May I grow in love and wisdom
May I find peace within myself
May I remember the lessons I have learned
May I dream big and believe

May I forever feel guided
May I know that I am not alone
May I find courage in forgiveness
May I remember that I can

May I value the lessons learned today
May I trust in their strength
May I allow peace to fill my heart
May the pure light within me guide my way on

— Monique B. Mitchell, PhD