

Fostering Photovoice

A photo exhibition about
the foster youth experience

Featuring photographs that depict identity, family, and
the foster care system by six LA based foster youth artists

Exhibition: Jan 25 - March 8, 2025

Closing Reception: March 8



DEPARTMENT OF CULTURAL AFFAIRS
City of Los Angeles

Fostering Photovoice

A photography exhibition about the foster youth experience

Fostering Photovoice is a group photography exhibition that reflects the lives and experiences of youth impacted by foster care. The project was conceived by a photovoice research collective that included six artists—all former foster youths between the ages of 18 and 25 who reside in Los Angeles County. Several UCLA undergraduate and graduate students were involved, among them, participants who have had lived experience in foster care, or had expertise in using the arts-based empowerment method called photovoice for research and social policy.

The collective came together over 7 weeks during the summer of 2023. The exhibition is organized by prompts and considers the differences in the views of each artist. It includes reflections on who the youth are, how they think about family, and how they would have liked the system to respond to and support their needs.

The series invites the viewer to beliefs about foster youth and the foster care system, including any biases they may have. It is also an opportunity to reflect on how to best support foster youth who enter state care through no fault of their own—both as children and as they transition to adulthood.

Team

Kate Watson, MSW, Principal Investigator

Yesi Camacho Torres, MSW, M.Ed., Graduate Co-Investigator

Amanda Solis, Undergraduate Co-Investigator

Abigail Rubtsova, Undergraduate Co-Investigator

Gabriella Cohen Herrera, Law and Policy Lead Graduate Co-Investigator

Isabella Reina, Media Coordinator

Angela, DP, JT, Link Kasey, Nancy Mogy, Zoe Wright, Artists

Supporters

UCLA Pritzker Center

Women's Lawyers Association of Los Angeles



D.P.

California Dreaming

When I first came to L.A., I expected it to be all palm trees and looking like Hollywood. But it didn't really look like that – there was graffiti everywhere, homeless people in tents on the streets, and it wasn't what I expected. It is also where I was removed from my mom, and my siblings and I were placed in different homes. LA wasn't what I expected it to be.





Nancy Mogy
Alleyway to Hell

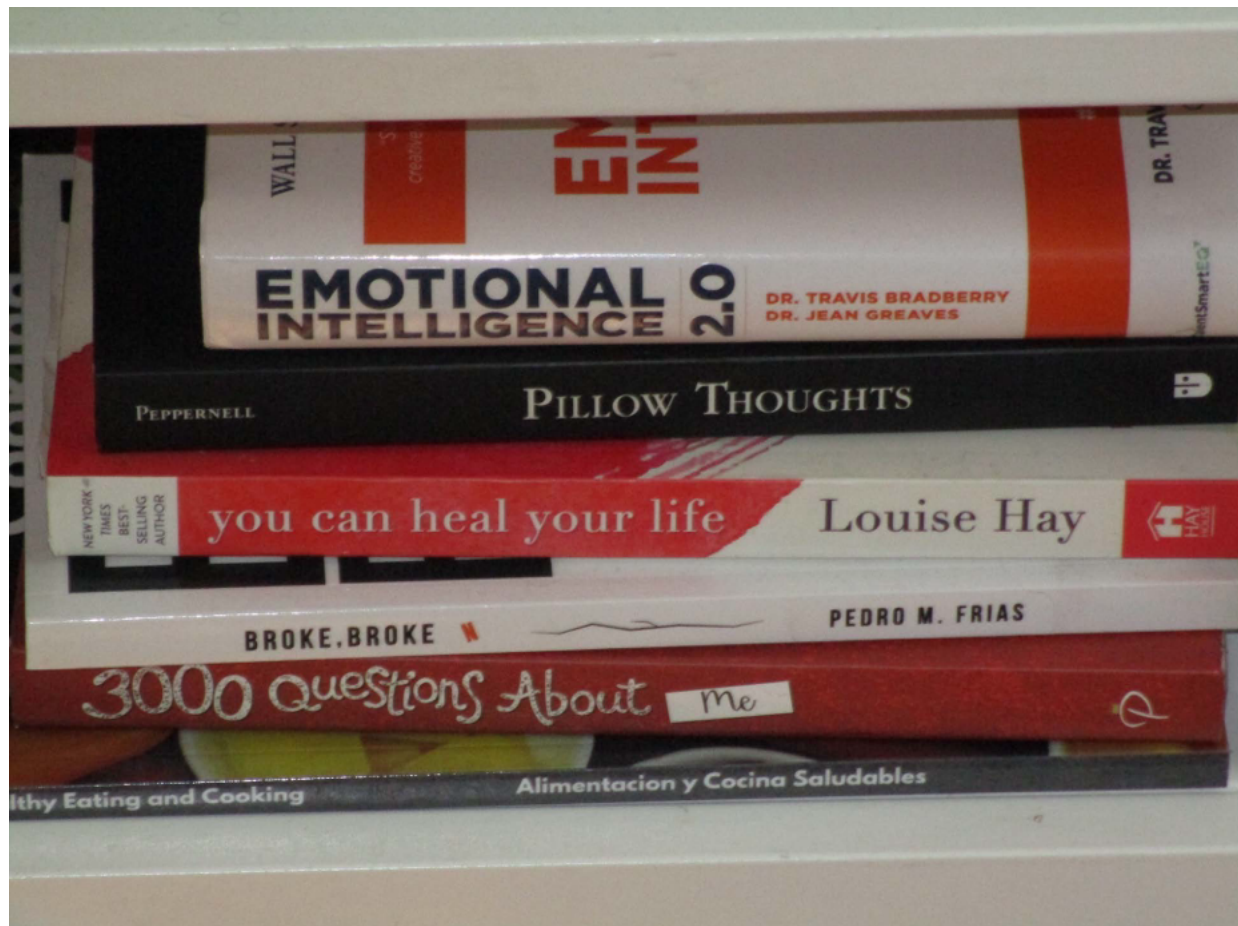
For many children, their home is a space of comfort, security and warmth; for me, it was a pit and playground for my anxiety, suicidal thoughts, and feelings of worthlessness to flourish. Despite the moments I was saved by playdates, no matter how enjoyable, walking down this alleyway to my 'home' remained a constant reminder that the darkness within me had a source—and this very alleyway led to its epicenter.



Nancy Mogy
Locked Out

As a young child, staring at this locked gate for hours felt like a reminder that I was unwanted, forgotten, and invisible. More often than not, my “mother” would forget that I was supposed to be “home.” As the darkness of the night would creep in, the scared child that I was would attempt to climb it, only to have my ribs cut by the sharp edges or my knees scraped from falling onto the concrete. Left to starve and howl, all for the hope of being heard.





Zoe Wright

You too should be at the top of the pedestal

Growing up I was placed into the role of an adult where I learned how to file taxes, fill out money orders, file court information, but today I am growing to learn about myself. How to deal with my emotions, my health, who I am as a person and how to communicate. The most formative years of my childhood were stagnant due to how my life path had played out. I'm now in the space to grow and heal the parts I never had time and energy to perfect and put on a pedestal. I deserve to be at the top of the pedestal. You too should be at the top of the pedestal.



Link Kayser
Coming Home

This photo is framed by a fence, looking through to a backyard and a flower bush along another fence. It captures the child-like perspective I held when walking to my brother's house whenever I visited. This backyard was my second home where I used to play with my siblings and acquired a hobby for gardening through picking the flowers. It symbolizes a sense of temporary security where I had access to water, food, and wifi when my mother was catching up on the bills.





J. Talavera
Where my personality stays

This is my storage unit where I keep some of my belongings as a college student facing homelessness.

I was emancipated right before the start of the pandemic. I didn't have anywhere else to go so this storage unit is where I spent most of my time during the pandemic while homeless. This was my most stable location, and I still consider it to be one of the most important places in my life and a reflection of who I am. This is something I carry with me. It shows how I keep going regardless of what I'm going through.



Zoe Wright

Unconditionally love, trust, and forgive

Learn to love yourself and be patient with your progress. You might not see it but it has to start somewhere. I grew up questioning and feeling like how could the 2 people that have created me, my mom and dad be the ones to pull the rug from up under me continuously which would hurt me everytime. I grew to believe that if they could do such an act, what would stop the people I come in contact with who have no obligation to me to do the same things knowing they don't have that deep connection and attachment to me. Today as a 20 year old I am still impacted by these feelings and thoughts, but also today as a 20 year old I will not let it continue to fear how I love. I am constantly learning to grow my understanding of my emotions. I deserve to learn how to unconditionally love, trust, and forgive. You too deserve to learn how to unconditionally love, trust, and forgive.



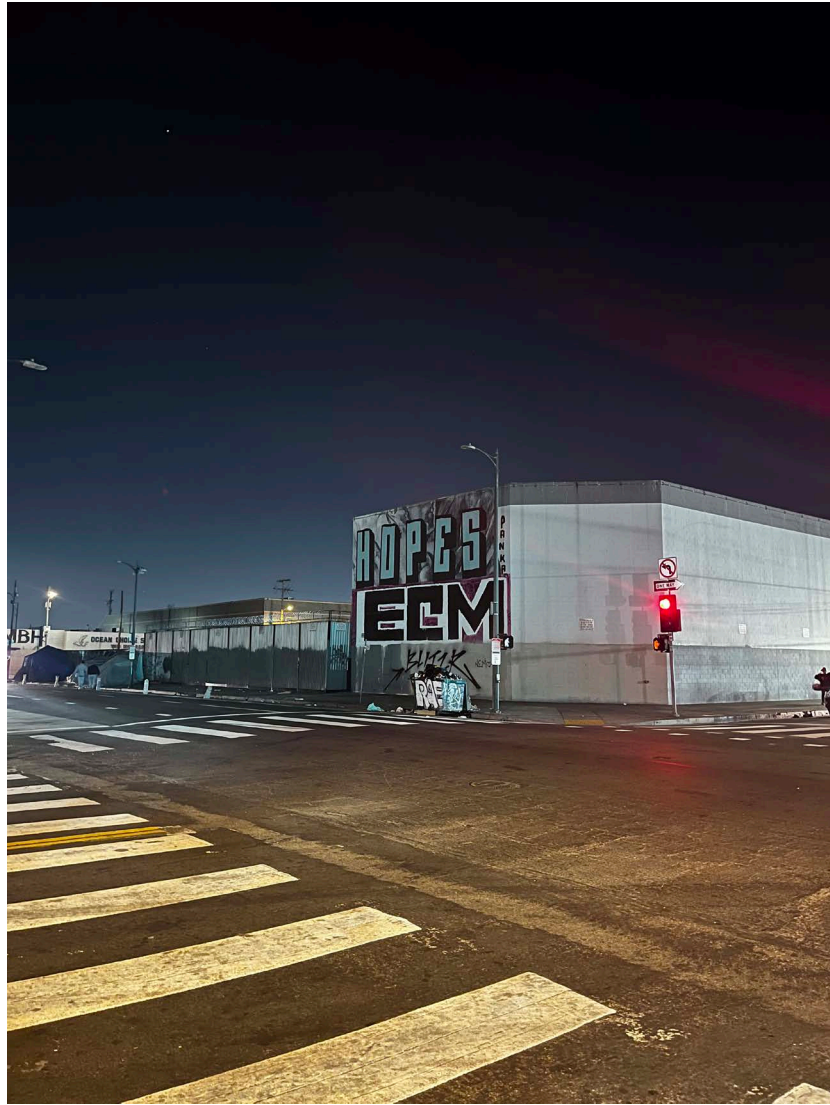
LOVE IS THE MOST
POWERFUL HEALING
FORCE THERE IS.
I GIVE IT
AND ACCEPT IT
without limitation.

LOUISE HAY
**HOW TO
love
yourself**
CARDS

WITHOUT MY PAST,
MISTAKES AND ALL,
I WOULD NOT BE
HERE TODAY.
I LOVE MYSELF
FOR MY WILLINGNESS
TO LEARN AND GROW.

I AFFIRM THAT I AM
WILLING TO RELEASE
THE CAUSES AND
PATTERNS IN MY
consciousness
THAT ARE CREATING
ANY NEGATIVE
CONDITIONS IN MY LIFE.

I AM INCREDIBLY CAPABLE



J. Talavera
Hopes over Fears

This graffiti art of the word "HOPES" can be seen in different parts of L.A. It's a reminder to keep looking for a better tomorrow and keep looking for hopes.

I took this photo when I was feeling restless at 3am and the only way I thought of stopping it was to go for a walk. When I came across this art, it reminded me of when I was in foster care and how foster youth stay everywhere but their foster homes. I like taking pictures of graffiti art and this message of the word 'hope' means so much more now, stepping out of foster care. I realize now that hope is what brought me this far and I continue to hope for a better future for myself and my community.

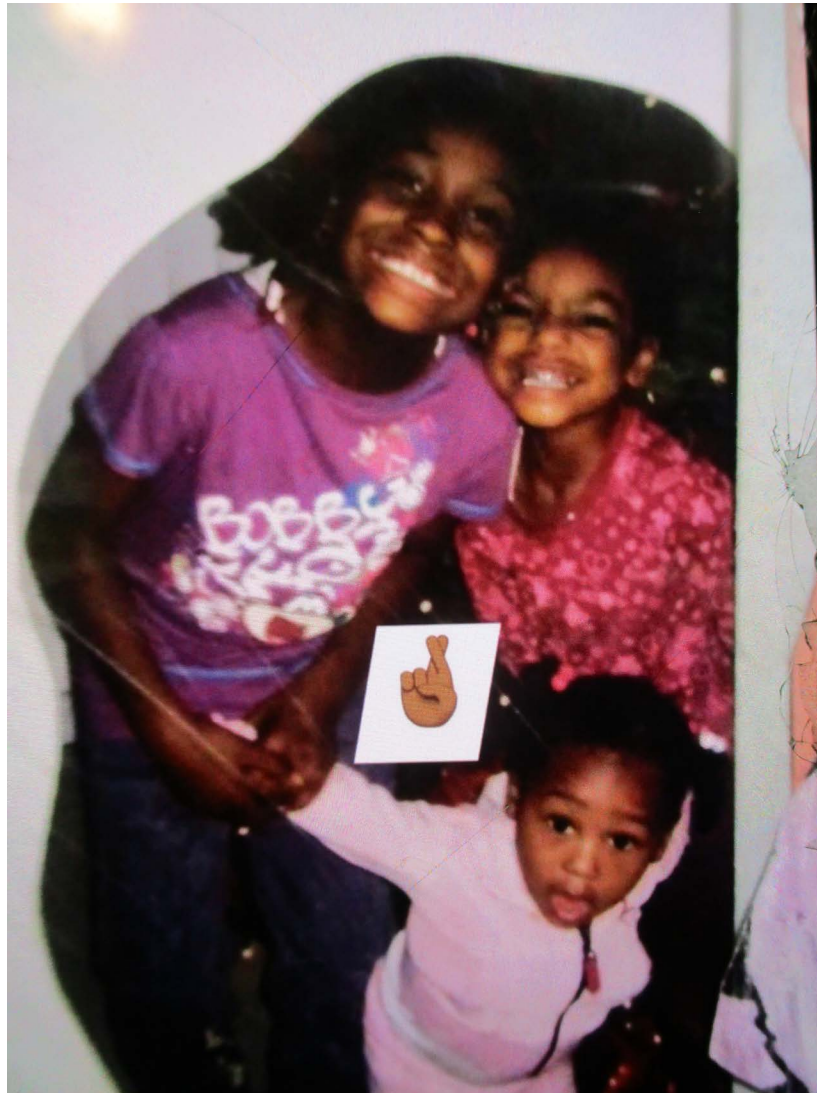




Zoe Wright

I hope you are learning to get past yours too

As a kid I felt like the little boy in green, watching my own family get along without me. I felt so estranged from my siblings. I was the only one out of 7 to go through foster care and it was weird to watch from afar my family get along effortlessly without me and feeling left out, turning me into the black sheep of the family. I had to grow from this negative observation and remember that, at the time, being in foster care was my barrier, but to also recognize the barrier was no longer there so I had to remember to not limit and continue to fear the unknown. The unknown being whether I would be accepted by my siblings. I had known nothing had changed with my relationships. I had felt guilty for my lack of presence and involvement. It took a lot of forgiving myself to remember that there were a lot of limitations at first that prevented me from being able to reach out and form these connections but I am no longer subjected to those limitations any more. I am trying to understand how to get past these limiting emotions. I hope you are learning to get past yours too.



D.P.

Sister Love Forever

This photo of me and my sisters was taken by a social worker at our foster home shortly after we were taken away from our mom. Everyone said that I was very protective of my little sisters and I think you can see that in the photo. Today I wish I could see them more often. They are my forever family.



Angelica Sac Tzep

I have a window, but the world outside isn't my own

I had the same routine every day. I spent my days looking out the window of the room I shared with other foster kids. I waited for the same van that tore my siblings and I apart, to take me back home. I was fortunate enough to leave the system with them and our sibling relationships grew. Family connections are more important to me now than thinking of how we were treated as we entered and got out of the system.



Link Kayser
Glimpses of Memories

This photo is framed by the rail of a stairwell. It surrounds the view of my mothers old car that she kept for years before having to get a new one. I used to think I would learn to drive in this car before it was repossessed. It represents the sense of hope where when I was in foster care as seeing this car meant I would get to spend time with my mother and take me on another adventure. The black and white nature of this photo speaks to the lack of color in my memory as a child, remembering moments more than visuals.





Nancy Mogy
אור - *light*

When I first joined my forever family, I felt shy and uncertain, yearning for acceptance and belonging. Yet, on Friday nights, the magic of Shabbat Dinners erased all worries and fears. Amidst the singing, laughter, and the glow of candlelight, fear and stress faded away. Religion had often been a tool used to instill fear and punishment by my biological mother, however, with my chosen family, Friday nights were transformed into moments of pure joy, love, and togetherness. The woman depicted in the painting is my beloved אור, Safta. She became the grandmother I had always dreamt of, showering me with love and unwavering support. Despite her passing years before my legal adoption, I know it would not have made much of a difference, because she never made me feel any different from her other grandchildren. To this day, her light continues to guide me, instilling humility, motivation, and a constant reminder to love without conditions. If I could revisit the past, I'd tell my younger self that my chosen family's love existed whether or not I was officially adopted. Although I knew I had found my forever family, the judge's ears remained deaf to my story. It took six years for a judge to finally listen – not just by reading court files, but to my voice. Sometimes I think about what my life might have been like if I had spoken up sooner, wondering if the resources devoted to me could have better served other youths in need. The system aims to treat us the same, but we are not.





Link Kayser
Unexpected Family

This photo is of my cat, Slater, sitting on a chair in my backyard where he likes to sleep during the day. He has been a part of the family for years: ever since I got adopted at 11. My family moved into our first apartment and he arrived about a month later. He represents a consistent, unique form of family in the second half of my life.



J. Talavera
True Happiness

To my stink <3,

No matter where we are, regardless of the environment, the love I have for my little sister is unwavering. My motivation, my inspiration, my source of laughter and reminder of how much I have to offer.

Thank you little one for being my biggest supporter and for being the reason why I fight every day. From watching the minions for the 50th time in a row to you showing me your nail art, you have opened my heart to continue to find love in the simplest things. You have no idea how much you inspire me to live and I will do whatever it takes to win at this game of life. Even if that small win is just to see you smile.



D.P.

New Beginnings

This is a statue outside the home I moved into with my son after leaving a foster care group home and then my son's aunt's house. It represents new beginnings for me because it's a transitional housing program for young mothers and I was really happy to be here.

Before I got pregnant with my son, I opted out of foster care for a year. I was on the run. But then I got pregnant and when it was close to time to deliver, I had no choice but to go back to my placement because the social workers said my son would be taken away from me if I didn't.

In a way I'm glad I got pregnant because, although I didn't want to go back at first, it helped me grow up and made sure my son and I had all of the resources we needed to thrive. Being in this program has really helped me a lot because they provide access to resources and the space to meet new people in my situation and learn new things.





Zoe Wright

This is your reminder

As an adult now thinking back to my child self it wasn't made apparent that just because of our limitations we are subjected to the undeserving feeling that comes along with our undefined definition of self love and acceptance. We often forget to remind ourselves that we are deserving of all no matter our situation, in the moment it might feel that way but our limitations don't define us. I had been in a place where I wasn't around people I trusted, loved and cared for until I met my chosen family. They continued to show me unconditional love which ultimately allowed the love they had for me to be the starting point of the love I would have for myself. I have been teaching myself by saying positive affirmations out loud, journaling as a way to express myself, and putting myself in spaces where I am reminded that I am blessed to be here in the moment of these people. I am deserving of all no later what I have been through and no matter what I will go through. You too are deserving of all and this is your reminder.



D.P.

Removed

This mural reminds me of when I first got taken away from my mom. The social workers were checking me and my siblings for bruises and my mom grabbed me by the arm, and we all ran to a nearby bus stop. A minute later, police rolled up and handcuffed my mom. Seeing this mural made me sad because it reminded me of all of us crying together that day and not knowing what was going on or what would happen next now that we were involved with the system.



Link Kayser
Trash Along With The Rest

This photo is of a trash bag half full of clothes and a couple of keepsakes sitting in the corner next to the door. I took this picture because everyone in foster care knows that when you move you barely get to take anything. The most would be clothes and a couple of items that were dear to you. Plus anything that you could carry in your hands. The rest would all be thrown away or lost forever. It was always put in trash bags and cast by the door ready for you to leave with it. This photo symbolizes the little care foster parents have for you, or in this case, your belongings.





Angelica Sac Tzep
Hello?

The phone calls I made during foster care were filled with tears. Hearing the voice of my parents without any certainty of seeing their faces again worried me. My voice in the system was too small to create any sort of change for my family and I.



Link Kayser
Addiction

This photo shows an array of one of my family member's pills. My entire family has been affected by medication. Despite the positive light shed onto medication as a form of helping people, within my experience, it has been used as a tool for tearing my family apart and exploitation of foster youth. Foster parents and adoptive parents think that medication is a solution for simple, non-medical things like behavioral issues and temper management. This image shows how medication can be abused to neglect issues that could be helped with therapy.



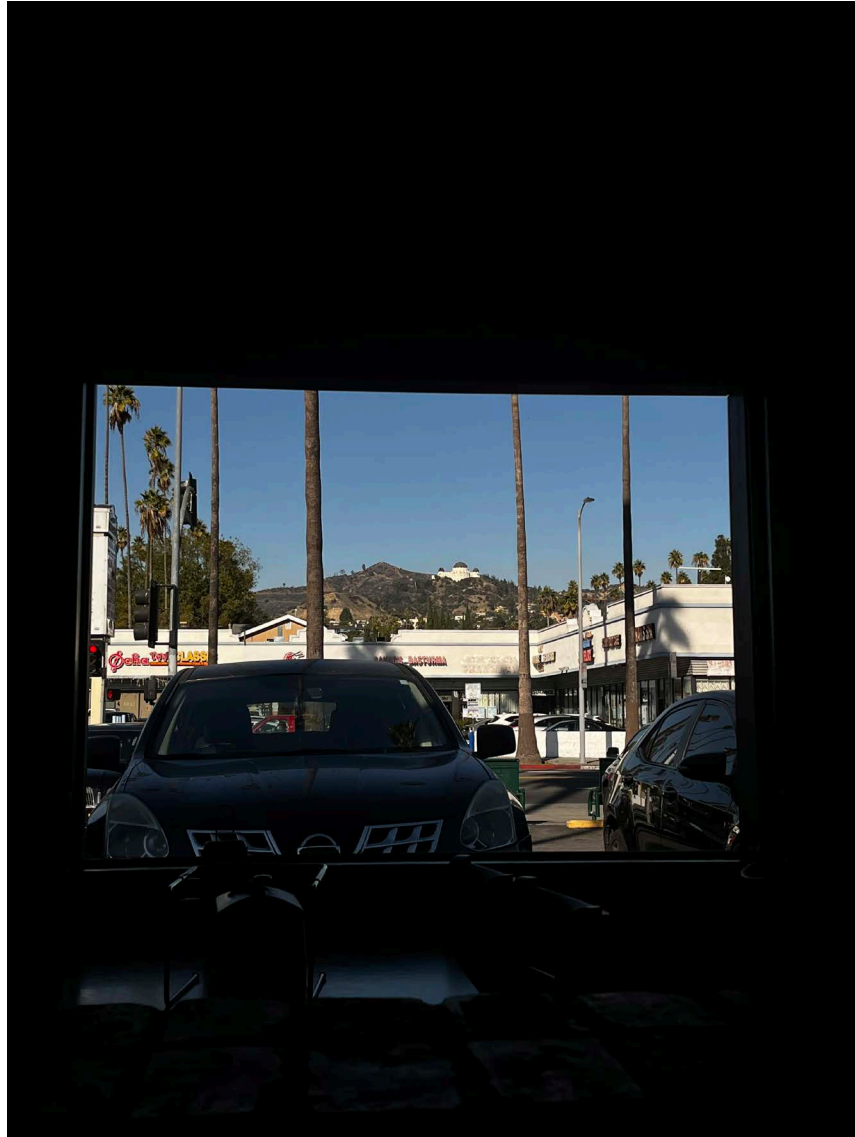
D.P.
Got love?

This is a mural near where I live. The message really resonated with me because, as a foster youth, I bounced around a lot and always wondered where I fit and if I was loved. I feel like a lot of foster kids feel like that. I wish the system did a better job ensuring kids feel loved and cared for, not just physically safe.



Angelica Sac Tzep
We are not files

Foster children are victims of systematic abuse and inequality. Although the foster care system is said to nurture children and keep them safe, the majority of our experiences reflect the areas of the system that are not highlighted. Siblings are separated from one another and grow to be strangers. Most of the time, they are the only family we have. The training of social workers and foster parents should be considered a priority as they can impact vulnerable children and their families positively or negatively.



J. Talavera

The view up there must be amazing...

This picture is capturing my longing of wanting to explore and take adventures but the current circumstances make it feel impossible.

The system didn't set me up for success. It made me feel insecure about my ability to accomplish the goals and do the things I wanted to do. The system made me feel like a puppet because I didn't have control; someone else was always pulling the strings and telling me I couldn't make it up there.





Nancy Mogy
Building of Broken Families

In Los Angeles, every foster youth eventually finds their way here — Edelman's Children Court. A place meant for happy endings amid broken families, overloaded caseworkers, and life-altering decisions. Each time I drove up this ramp, it felt like my entire life would be altered based on the outcome of my case that day. Being here felt like a living nightmare. Forced to wait for an indefinite amount of hours, suffocated by the lack of ventilation, facing my biological mother, the puppeteer of my trauma and night terrors staring at me from across the room. It was within these walls that my personal evolution began. A building that once was the breeding ground for my panic attacks, evolved into the place where I finally learned to speak up for myself. I let too many court dates go by where I let a judge who knew nothing about me - stereotype me and assume I was just a rebellious teenager mad at her "mother." While many children yearn for reunification with their parents, I was old enough to know my story was different, and I could not heal in the same place that broke me. I only wish I had found the strength to advocate for myself sooner.



Zoe Wright
You too are a flower

Foster kids are like flowers. You don't treat a flower just anyway you want too, that flower is specific to its needs. Different kids need different elements of love and support just as flowers do. The problem was the system did not take the time to look at us as who we are and what we needed; instead it felt like we were just another name to the list, a means to another paycheck. Many foster kids were deprived of the vital necessities and basic rights needed to flourish. I wasn't able to do the things I knew I needed until now as a 20 year old. I have the power to take care of myself by seeking counseling, regular health check ups, forming a support group, reconnecting with my family, and building new vulnerable connections. I am a flower that is constantly growing. Remember to nourish yourself in any way you need because you too are a flower.





J. Talavera

My future is close, right behind the mountains

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