My name is Will and I am a CASA Volunteer. I am you.

I became a CASA volunteer to be a positive black role model, and that is how I met Anton. He is a 14-year-old African American living in foster care. This is his story…

At eight months of age, Anton entered the foster care system after his mom admitted to using heroin then left him on the doorstep of a man she claimed was Anton's father. Anton remained in care for about a year until his mother successfully completed a drug rehab program and had her son returned to her. Anton lived with his mother until she was sentenced to prison – he was 10 years old and placed with his grandmother. By the time Anton entered his teens, both the Division of Youth and Family Services (DYFS) and the police would respond to numerous violent arguments between Anton and his grandmother. Despite the love she felt for her grandson, she felt unable to provide the guidance that he needed, so Anton entered the foster care system again.

Just about six months later, I entered Anton's life. I was honestly a little frightened, given his record with the police and DYFS. What greeted me was a quiet young man who readily acknowledged his faults and was genuinely remorseful for his actions. He told me that he liked his foster mother, but missed his home and especially his grandmother's cooking.

Academically, Anton struggled and vented his frustrations at his teachers. The disruption that Anton caused in the classroom prompted his teachers to recommend remedial classes. I knew that his outbursts caused a problem, but I also knew that Anton was smart and just need extra help to realize his potential. So I advocated in court that Anton receive tutoring and stay in a regular classroom. I talked to him at length about how important an education is and encouraged him to apply himself in school. It wasn't an easy road, but after nearly three years, the tutoring and my persistence have helped and Anton is doing better in school. His teacher even told me that he received a "B" on his last term paper. I am so proud of him.

I honestly do not know what will happen to Anton, but when I see the twinkle in his eye and a smile on his face talking about his plans for the future, I have a feeling he will be okay. In the meantime, I am happy to be the volunteer that makes sure that Anton doesn't become another statistic of the child welfare system.

Anton's story is just one among the 700 children who are in the foster care system in Atlantic and Cape May Counties. Many more children have stories like Anton's and need a helping hand. Will you help lift up their voice? To donate or volunteer please call (609) 601-7800 or visit www.AtlanticCapeCASA.org.