

I don't like talking about my childhood. It's too deep. But a few years ago I met the lawyer Saul Dismont and I told him my story. We talked about trying to stop it from happening to other kids. I was in prison at Co-Ed the first time we met. I got caught up a lot on the street and have been to prison a few times now so I don't think people would think I would care about all this but I do. I don't want any other kid to be treated like I was.

I don't live in Bermuda now but I message Mr Dismont every few months to see how things are going. He told me to look at the Royal Gazette last week about the places in the US that kids are sent to by the Director of Child and Family Services. I was in care for most of my life and the Director sent me away to those places. So I know more about it than a quick visit and a show by those places that Bermuda makes rich.

You all know why the parents are speaking out and why the media are asking questions. You have just been throwing kids away in those places. And you leave us there. When we complain you don't listen. When we ask for help you tell us you are there to help us. Then you do nothing. You know you can ignore us because most of us have no one, not even parents. And then when adults try to help us or the media ask you questions you attack them? And you all care about kids? You're jokers.

My mama passed away when I was a child. I stayed with different family members but then I was sent to live at the residential home in Bermuda. It wasn't like a home. I was placed with some foster parents for a while but everything always felt like it could suddenly change. I never knew what was going on or how things were being decided. I was just moved around here and there. I don't think the Director ever tried to have me adopted by anyone.

I started to get in trouble at school, mostly for fighting, and I was having 'treatment' to help me deal with things like my mama passing. One day when I was 13 the Department told me they were going to take me to a kids camp in the US where I would go skiing and do other fun activities for a couple of weeks. It wasn't a kid's camp and they dumped me in the US for two and a half years.

I never knew how it happened. I didn't have a criminal record. I had never even been arrested before but the Director sent me to a wilderness programme with American kids caught up in crime or self-harming. It was at Redcliff Ascent in Utah in the middle of nowhere with just trees and bushes. There were no toilets and just cold water. The other kids were all messed up. Some had slash marks all up their arms. One tried to commit suicide while I was there. It was a lot for me to deal with. I was only 13. I felt real bad, very far away, alone and that no one cared about me. The other kids were all from the US, so they were still in their own country.

I kept asking why I was there but no one ever gave me a real reason. I wasn't a criminal. I had never even been arrested before. I wasn't self-harming. I wasn't crazy. I was just there because the Director didn't know where to put me. I was missing my mama and angry about what was happening to me. All I wanted was for someone to come and get me. I had regular calls with the Department and I wrote letters asking them to bring me home to Bermuda but

nothing happened. They left me there for 5 months and I don't remember them ever visiting me. They only came at the end to transport me.

I completed the programme but then the Director had me sent to Natchez Trace Youth Academy in Tennessee. It looked okay from the outside but really it's kind of like a prison and a school. Everything was crazy there. I felt like a criminal. I was still only 13 but you're put with all ages up to 18 and a lot of the other kids had already been convicted of criminal offences and were linked with Bloods or Crips gangs. There was a lot of 'street' behaviour, with fights every single day. You would just be eating and then suddenly there was a fight or you would be all watching TV and suddenly there would be another fight. It happened all the time. I learned quick that you had to fight. It was survival.

The kids that didn't fight were picked on and beat down a lot and their stuff was taken. Sometimes in the middle of the night boys would get together and just run to your bed while you were sleeping and give you beats. I was only 13 and not a gang member and I didn't know anyone. There were two other Bermudians that I would see in class but we were not allowed to stay together and they stayed in different buildings. So where I was no one was going to have my back. I fought all the time so that no one would mess with me. I knew I could never back down. It all became just normal.

The Director only arranged for me to have about 4 visits from family in the whole 2 ½ years I was away. One day an aunt was coming to see me from Tennessee and it was the first time I was going to be released for the weekend. But before she arrived I had a fight with another boy. When she got there the staff told us we only had 30 minutes as family visits were a privilege and I lost it due to the fight. I never had anyone ever coming to see me. I was really looking forward to seeing her and going away for the weekend. My aunt was upset too. She had flown from Tennessee and had to pay for it all. I was already missing Bermuda and angry about being left in the US but that made it even worse. I was stuck in that place, I didn't want to be there and they all knew there were fights all the time, and that you have to defend yourself. Then they stop me seeing my aunt even though they knew I never had visits from anyone.

I completed the programme there but then the Director sent me to the Devereux facility in Florida. I don't remember anyone from the Department even bothering to come and travel with me. I think it was the staff from Natchez Trace that transported me. Devereux was a better place but I still didn't want to be there. I wanted to be back in Bermuda. I don't see why I was sent to any of those places. I wasn't a criminal, I wasn't self harming, I wasn't crazy. In my 'treatment' sessions they asked the same questions they had asked me before in Bermuda. "How are you today?" and "What do you want to talk about?" Being away from Bermuda just made me feel worse. Abandoned.

I had monthly telephone conferences between the Department and whichever place I was at. I also had a few calls with family. But in the whole 2 ½ years no one came from the Department to actually visit me. I just remember them coming to transport me from Utah to Tennessee and then back to Bermuda. That was it.

After 11 months I completed the programme at Devereux. The Director was then going to send me to a place called Glen Mills but then I was brought back to Bermuda. They said it was because the Department had no more money left. So it wasn't like they really wanted me back or anything or that they felt bad for what they had done. I was 15 years old. It felt really good to be home but it was like the Director had not made any plans for me. Where I would stay or who would look after me and what I should do. I was homeless. So I had to live at the Youth Development Centre while they tried to find somewhere for me. It is not like a home. My family here told me that it was only after I had come back that the Department tried to find places for me to stay. So I found some places but they said no. And they said no when I asked if I could stay in a place with one of the social workers to look after me.

It was trash. There was no real plan for me. I didn't know what was going on. One day they said that I was going to school. I wanted to. I wanted my GED. On my first day I got dressed in my uniform early in the morning. Then they didn't take me. I just walked out from the Youth Development Centre. I was doing it more and more. I was sleeping on different couches and floors with my friends from the street. They were watching out for me, giving me money.

After a while I got arrested for stealing. When I got bail the Director said he wouldn't sign it. I don't think he had anywhere proper for me to stay. So I had to go to jail at Co-ed. When I got there I had to take all my clothes off and stand butt naked in front of the prison guards. They said they have to do it to everyone but it didn't make me feel any better. I had to wear an orange uniform every day. I was taken to a small place in the prison just for boys. I had my own small locked cell and there was a larger area where I could sit to watch tv with the other boy that was there. Sometimes I was there without any other kids. There was a phone but you had to have someone on the outside to put money on it. The other boy and I would talk a lot but we were locked in our separate cells for 18 hours a day and 22 hours on Saturdays. Prison guards said kids who had not yet been found guilty were treated worse than adults who were guilty for killing someone.

When we went back to court a few weeks later the judge got real angry that the Director hadn't signed my bail or got me a lawyer. The judge said it was Director's job to take care of me and that he had to take me and get me a lawyer. When I came back to court a few weeks later for my trial I still didn't have a lawyer. The judge was angry about it again and the trial had to be adjourned.

I pleaded guilty. I wasn't going to lie about what I did. I got in trouble again for stealing and breaching probation. I pleaded guilty again. I always pleaded guilty to everything I had done. I have had prison time again and I got more in to drugs, stealing with my friends and fighting. I was still not even 18 yet and I was homeless with a criminal record and no education. I can read and write but not like professional. Someone has helped me write this.

There are some good people that tried to pull me in a better direction but so much had happened already and my friends were looking out for me and had my back. The street was like my family and my home then. The Department never made me feel like it wanted me or cared about me. They would say they were spending a lot of

money on me, like I should thank them for it. When I came back from the US, the Director tried to send me back to the US, to Glen Mills. The Royal Gazette said that everyone knew that place was abusing children back in 2000. So why would you try to send me there after that? And it was shut down last year due to more child abuse. If I had been sent there I would have still been there until a few months before it shut. What could have happened to me there? The only reason the Director could not send me was because in court Mr Dismont and Tiffanne Thomas came to help me. One minute the Director was saying that I needed to stay on a care order and be sent to treatment facility in the US and then the next minute he was saying that I didn't need to be on a care order at all. I wish I had Mr Dismont and Ms Thomas when I was first put with the Department. They also found out that Glen Mills had written to the Director saying that it didn't even do the programme that he wanted me to do.

I'm older than 18 now and I have started learning a trade. I am trying to not get caught up and stay out of jail. But I'm not going to lie, it's hard. You do what you have to do to survive. That is what I was taught at the Department and when I was away. I also learned not to trust them too and how to look after myself on the street. There are a lot of people that will tell you the same thing but they don't want to talk about it. And a lot have got caught up so its not like people have wanted to listen.

I really don't want it to happen to any other kids. There may be some that might need treatment in a special place but it should be a nice place. And keep them in Bermuda. Sending them away will make things worse. And when they come back they have nothing and are just dropped.