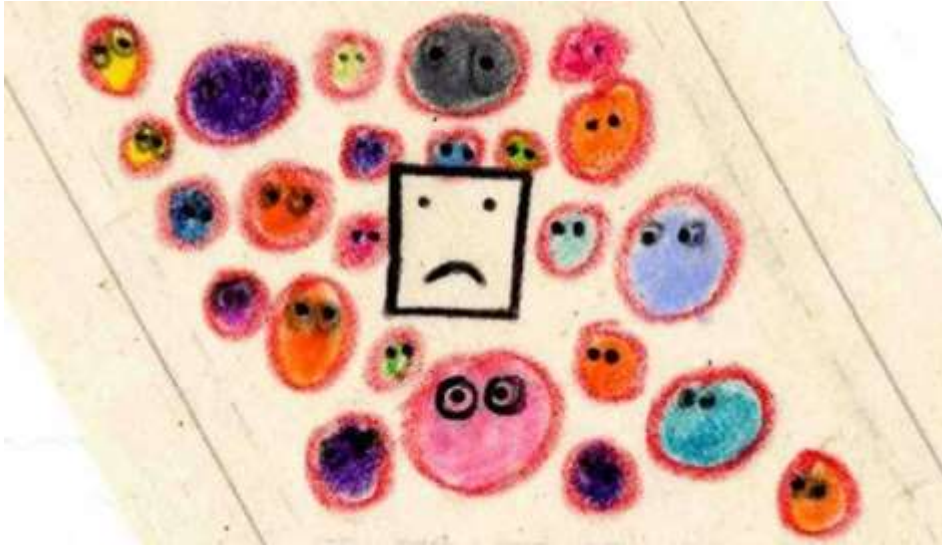


# VICKI'S STORY



Which is tougher? To be a girl of 11, taken from your mom when you depended on each other, or to be a young lady of 13 back in foster care, coming to realize home may never be the home for which you wish? Vicki came to us at the age of 11, shared her golden birthday in our midst, staying one year to the day. Another year passed and she was brave enough to tell. Knowing the result of asking for intervention meant entering the realm of foster care again; Vicki had come to learn what acceptable behavior was and what was harmful for all. We welcomed our young lady back; and how she had grown, wiser and stronger and taller!

Remember being fourteen and life wasn't fair? Too old to be a kid and too young to have much say? Multiply that feeling by ten when you're a teen in foster care. Vicki feels everyone is watching for every move, talking about it, analyzing it, asking her to explain, asking her to evaluate her actions, asking her to talk when she just wants to be left alone. To social workers, therapists, teachers, counselors, principals, officers, and us; her favorite saying is "I don't know" as she hides behind her sleeve. Perhaps Vicki hides behind her sleeve because sometimes she feels FOSTER CHILD is printed on her forehead. Many times she has to say she doesn't live with her mom and her dad. She feels the odd person out. She develops a certain hardness to shield her from her peers whose parents have reservations with allowing their children to hang with her. Vicki lives with the opinions of those who know and those who think they know reflecting in the eyes of those who judge.

Through all of the struggles and doubts and hardships, Vicki has given her best. Last month she was recognized as eighth grade Student of the Month, an award for her hard work and constant improvement. Vicki is a lovely, young lady with a huge heart. We could all learn from her acceptance of people as they are. Young, old, physically challenged, of another nationality—Vicki sees each as a person. She has touched the lives and hearts of many of our family and friends. We applaud her strength and her willingness to make a difference in her life and the lives of those she loves.