



TOGETHER WE ARE CHANGING STORIES

UNITED WAY OF ABILENE
STORY BANK

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DIAMON AND SAMANTHA

Diamon learned about the opportunity to volunteer as a Lunch Buddy through the School-Based program at Big Brothers Big Sisters during a college campus presentation. A sophomore at Abilene Christian University, Diamon knew she had something to offer as a role model to a child and wanted to serve as a mentor.

Diamon was matched with Little Sister Samantha in March 2016 and the two see each other at lunch time each week in Samantha's school cafeteria. The two enjoy playing air hockey on Diamon's iPad and having conversations while playing games. They laugh a lot together too.

Samantha's mother feels like Diamon is the perfect and best match for her daughter. She has seen such positive changes in Samantha in their time together. She stated that her daughter talks more and is just "doing so much better in so many ways because of Diamon".

Diamon's enthusiasm for her match is shared saying, "Being Samantha's big has been a blessing, and wonderful experience. I hope in the future we can continue and blossom together. Samantha is a smart girl and a beautiful person inside and out. I know she will grow up to become someone who does great things in this world."

Samantha shared that her Big is kind to her and that makes her happy. She gives her match with Diamon "a perfect 10".



Samantha and Diamon



Big Brothers Big Sisters

A STORY OF ADOPTION

Joe and Maggie Walker, a CASA team, first encountered the heartbreaking story of sisters V (age 5) and L (1) when we were assigned their case in 2014. Their story began when the girls and their sibling were abandoned by their mother. Without their mother, and each having different fathers who were not involved in their lives, they were left with only their grandfather, M as the remaining family to care for them.

Unfortunately, M had serious health issues that left him incapable of caring for the little girls properly and that is when the unthinkable happened and ended in the death of their sibling. Joe and Maggie were appointed to the girls' case after they entered foster care.

The girls were fortunate to have been taken in by an amazing family who had previously tried to help the grandfather, so the children finally had the support of people they could depend on. It was apparent to us from the beginning that the girls had found heroes in the family that already loved them as their own.

As much tragedy as these precious girls had already endured, they remained sweet and loving and the girls struggled to settle in and have a normal life. But their lives were again touched by grief as M passed away bringing them yet another loss, as well as creating problems with their case.

Unfortunate paperwork errors forced the case to be closed out of the CPS system. Through it all, the Walkers remained a constant in the life of the sisters.

Three years after abandoning them, their mom had come back into the picture, but with only minimal interest in the girls. Thankfully the girls had an excellent CPS case worker who agreed that the mother was not a safe or viable placement option and agreed with us that it was in the girls' best interests to stay with the foster family permanently. Yet even with everyone in agreement, the system nearly failed the girls, leaving them without the security of a permanent home.

In stepped another hero for V and L: a local attorney who worked pro bono to help the family with a private suit instigated to protect the girls. The Walkers kept all parties of the case informed and connected; informing the attorneys and the Family Court Judge the entire history of the case while providing comfort and support to the foster family who had sacrificed so much, reminding them that they were not alone.

Both Maggie and Joe feel how critical the role of a CASA is in looking out for the best interest of the children by keeping a clear and accurate history for parties who may come into the case later. This aspect of the role, along with actively fighting their cause, was instrumental in providing facts to the Family Court Judge that resulted in re-opening their case and giving the children another chance for permanency and a forever home.

After three years of dedicated effort by so many, the sweet girls were finally adopted by the same caring family who had first taken them in with love as their only motivation.



Adoption Day for V and L

CHARLY

Charly, an Abilene High School student, was involved in Communities in Schools for three years. Before she joined the CIS program on her campus, she was dealing with a lot of challenges, including family conflict. Charly didn't think she would be able to do the things she wanted to do in life after moving out of her home to live with other family.

"I had lost hope. Then I found Communities in Schools. CIS helped encourage me to reach for the stars," said Charly. The CIS Success Coach on campus, Ms. Hansley, talked with Charly and helped her set goals to reach her goal of being a licensed cosmetologist.

Ms. Hansley reminded Charly to focus on her grades and attendance. Charly didn't have the resources to get the supplies needed to complete her cosmetology courses, but CIS was there to help prepare her for success. This year, Charly will graduate as a licensed cosmetologist.

"CIS prepared me for success. They changed my story," said Charly.



Charly



Communities
In Schools

The Big Country

DEJA AND VICTOR

Brother and sister Deja and Victor came to Adaptive Recreation as new participants. They expressed their interest in obtaining jobs. Both were young adults with no work experience or job skills.

Adaptive Recreation staff worked to identify target areas for the siblings and encouraged them to attend job skills classes at the center, including cooking class, kitchen preparation, grammar, coping skills, math, and money management. Over time, staff noticed that both Deja and Victor excelled in kitchen preparation, math, and money skills.

Deja and Victor began applying for positions that fit with the skills that they had gained proficiency in. Deja found a position as a cashier at a new restaurant. She immediately came to Adaptive Recreation to inform them that she had gotten the position with skills they had helped her learn.

Victor applied for many jobs in the retail industry, but did not get many calls back for interviews. Adaptive Recreation staff encouraged him to continue to apply for jobs, particularly in the food industry. After applying for several positions, Victor found a position that matched with his skill set. He began working in a restaurant kitchen at Dyess Air Force Base.

Deja and Victor found the support and services they needed to gain independence at Adaptive Recreation, a United Way of Abilene Community Partner.



Victor and Deja participate in Adaptive Recreation's Rec'ing Crew