

Testimony of Osbert Duoa
Senate Judiciary Hearing on “The Juvenile Justice and Delinquency
Prevention Act: Preserving Potential, Protecting Communities.”
Monday, June 9, 2014
Tides Family Services
Pawtucket, Rhode Island

Hello my name is Osbert Duoa and I am 20 years old. I was born in Liberia in 1994. I came to the US with my mom in 1999 when I was 5 years old. We lived in Pawtucket. After a few years, my dad and 3 other brothers came to the US. We all lived separately.

I began getting into trouble when I was 14 years old. When I first got into trouble, as part of my probation, I was sent to live with my father in California. Me & my dad did not get along. I was raised by my mom and did not feel comfortable in California with my dad. I began to hustle in order to get enough money to buy a bus ticket back to RI. Finally I was able to get enough money and took the bus across the country back to RI. No one knew that I was back. I had to stay with friends and was back on the streets. I got arrested for breaking & entering, as well as violating my probation (not living in California) and I spent 7 months in the Rhode Island Training School. When I was released, my probation officer referred me to the Youth Transition Center (YTC) at Tides in Pawtucket. That is how I became connected to Tides and started in the YTC Program.

At Tides, I became part of a positive group of people. I was introduced to activities that I might not have been able to participate in- Six Flags, bowling, movies and hiking. They bought me food when I was hungry. They helped me stay in school, transporting me to and from high school. When I was 16, I began working at Harvest Kitchen, a culinary job training program for kids on probation. Tides helped me get to work on time and not miss a day. Getting into trouble and being on probation was difficult and stressful. I had to think before I did anything. I was being sneaky. Once I started working at Harvest Kitchen and making money, it made me stay on track. I had people supporting me at Tides and at work. My mom continued to support me and I had a baby brother to take care of. All of these things helped me to stay strong and I did not violate my probation. My probation ended when I was 18 years old.

I graduated from high school, helped my mom get our own house in Providence, and helped take care of my little brother. I gott a car and got hired as the Retail

Sales Manager for Harvest Kitchen, where I work at the Rhode Island Farmers Markets. I enjoy making my own money and I am not influenced by my old friends any longer. I am my own person with my own goals.

I left Tides in 2012, but I still visit and bring samples of our Harvest Kitchen products for people at Tides. Tides created a family environment for me. When I was younger, I didn't realize that there were people who cared about me. Tides made me realize that. I am still growing and still learning.