

Brendan Doyle
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Kelly Meehleib: Welcome to the Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts podcast series on Juvenile Law. Today we are focusing on the youth voice. Oftentimes the youth voice gets lost in the system of judges, lawyers, social workers, and advocates all trying to determine the best interests of the child.

This podcast was intended to present the youth's story of their time in the foster care system. To preserve the integrity of the interview and the youth's voice, content editing was not done. Only editing to smooth the podcast for the ease of the listener was completed.

We are lucky to have with us today Brendan Doyle. Brendan is a former foster youth from San Diego County who experienced foster care through the child welfare and probation systems. Brendan, thank you so much for joining us today.

Brendan Doyle: Yes, thank you.

Kelly Meehleib: I wanted to start from the beginning. It's my understanding that you were placed in foster care three times.

Brendan Doyle: Correct.

Kelly Meehleib: And when was the first time?

Brendan Doyle: When I was around seven years old, after my grandfather had passed away.

Kelly Meehleib: Okay, and who were you removed from?

Brendan Doyle: My mother's custody.

Kelly Meehleib: Your mother's custody?

Brendan Doyle: By CPS.

Kelly Meehleib: Okay. And so, where did you live after you were removed?

Brendan Doyle: I went to Polanski as a temporary hold until they found a bed for me at New Alternative 16, NA 16, and then I moved to my final placement of that era and went to San Diego Center for Children.

Kelly Meehleib: And how long did you live there?

Brendan Doyle: The whole thing? It was about nine months.

Kelly Meehleib: About nine months?

Brendan Doyle: It was about a month in Polanski, about four in NA 16, and about three in San Diego Center for Children.

Kelly Meehleib: Okay. And did you get to see your mom during that time at all?

Brendan Doyle: Yes, I did. Unlimited visits which were supervised.

Kelly Meehleib: So limited supervised visits. Okay.

And when did you end up going back home after that first time?

Brendan Doyle: After nine months and I went back into my mother's custody after they thought I was emotionally stable.

Kelly Meehleib: Okay. And so, let's talk about the second time you were placed in foster care. When was that?

Brendan Doyle: It was December of 2012 and I got placed through the probation system.

Kelly Meehleib: So, first time through...?

Brendan Doyle: CPS.

Kelly Meehleib: CPS and the second time through probation. And where were you placed at that time?

Brendan Doyle: I was placed at DN Associates.

Kelly Meehleib: DN Associates, okay. How was that experience?

Brendan Doyle: That experience was hard as a transition because I went from a lifestyle of do whatever I want and get away with it to discipline and well oriented structure. So, the transition was difficult. The overall experience taught me manners, you know, household cleaning, cooking, and other skills that were very helpful I use in my daily life now.

Kelly Meehleib: So, lots of life skills that you learned there? And how long were you there?

Brendan Doyle: I was there for two years and then I got discharged and placed back in my mother's custody.

Kelly Meehleib: Okay, so you completed the program, is that what happened?

Brendan Doyle: Correct.

Kelly Meehleib: And then you got placed back...

Brendan Doyle: Correct.

Kelly Meehleib: ...with your mom? Okay. And then you were home for a little bit?

Brendan Doyle: I was home for about three months and then I ended up violating probation and coming back into the system and they put me right back at DN Associates

Kelly Meehleib: Okay.

Brendan Doyle: And they, they continued to help me. And they counseled, you know, "Why do you do it?" "Why did this certain things happen?" And they counseled me and walk me through each step. And the therapy and, you know, social groups really helped me rehabilitate for the second time. And concluded my foster care system in its entirety.

Kelly Meehleib: And, and that was in Fresno?

Brendan Doyle: Yes, both of them because it was the same group home.

Kelly Meehleib: Okay. And did you get the services? Do you feel like you got the services you need when you were in Fresno?

Brendan Doyle: In Fresno, yes. Here in San Diego when I was younger, you know, I don't think so. I think that those group homes legitimately failed because there's 30 people and there's four people taking care of them and they take shifts, so they're not about having feelings for the, for the individual. They're about meal preparation, get them to and from school, and put you to bed. It's not about counseling, therapy, and other essential things that are needed to function as a child, as a teen, and as an adult.

Kelly Meehleib: Okay. And so, while you were there did anyone talk to you about your goals, what you wanted to do?

Brendan Doyle: No.

Kelly Meehleib: No.

Brendan Doyle: Not at all. My social worker came in once and they, they went in and they said, “We should do a plan for you, of what you want to do.” And they she gave me the paper, and I remember her taking her from me and said, “Oh you're too young to fill this out, we'll take care of it.” And I thought that would, not at the time because I was young, I was like, *Oh I guess that's just protocol*. But, you know, as a reflection, whether you 3 months or 30 years old, you should be able to, whether it's draw if you're not able to talk or able to write or able to speak what your goals are in life, whether they're accurate as a three-month-old or thirty, they're very accurate, I think you should be able to speak that no matter what age you are.

Kelly Meehleib: Alright, so you feel like it would have been important and would be very helpful if you have a chance to talk about your goals and plans for the future.

Brendan Doyle: Correct.

Kelly Meehleib: So, I know that you're currently going to school, where are you going?

Brendan Doyle: I'm going to San Diego Mesa College.

Kelly Meehleib: Congratulations. And how's that going? Do you like it?

Brendan Doyle: It's going well. I wish I had better academics as far as I'd being able to go from high school to a four year, but you know circumstances prevail and I will prevail through and overcome those circumstances and I'll keep persisting until I make it to where I want to be.

Kelly Meehleib: Great and so where are you living now?

Brendan Doyle: I'm living in my mom's house, I just leased my first apartment today.

Kelly Meehleib: That's awesome. Congratulations. What are your future plans?

Brendan Doyle: Right now, I'm just I'm taking a break from being a computer technician for the holidays and I plan on opening it up January 1st. So again...

Kelly Meehleib: January 1st?

Brendan Doyle: Yeah.

Kelly Meehleib: Okay.

Brendan Doyle: Just taking a little break.

Kelly Meehleib: Great. Is there anything particularly important that you want people to know, judges, attorneys, social workers, about your experience that would, you think would be helpful to them?

Brendan Doyle: There are certain people that helped me through the entire process and there's some people that wrote me off as, you know, he'll go home, he'll end up on parole, he'll end up in prison, he'll be incarcerated. The people that believed that were blind and wrong. The people that believed in me and the person who I am, those are the people that were right.

Kelly Meehleib: The Judicial Council's Center for Families, Children & the Courts works with courts throughout the state to improve outcomes for children and families in both the juvenile justice and child welfare systems. For more information, please visit our website at www.courts.ca.gov under Programs for Families and Children.