

Countdown to 2020 ... Being connected to HOPE 4 Youth saved Amber's life



Amber started coming to the Drop-In Center soon after aging out of foster care. She was precariously housed and would come in a few days a week to meet with the youth coordinators and have a hot meal. Sometimes she would visit the food pantry or clothing closet if she needed something special. When Amber first moved into supportive transitional housing, she was excited about her future. "Education is important to me," she told her vocational counselor. "I really want to be a nurse, can you help me get there?"

We were shocked when Amber left HOPE Place early one Friday morning with only a backpack. "I met someone online, and I'm leaving," she announced. "He has a place for me to stay. He's going to take care of me." When I asked for more details, she became very defensive, "he doesn't want his information given out." Immediately red flag warnings went off in my head. "Be careful Amber," I told her cautiously. "Please call me anytime this doesn't feel right." Amber assured me that she's very resourceful, "I can take care of myself," she huffed and walked out the door.

After Amber left on Friday, I called her- several times, concerned. I texted her- several times, but she didn't answer. My gut told me something wasn't right. I feared the worst, that she was a victim of sex trafficking.

On Monday, Amber texted me. "I'm in the woods. I'm cold." "Where are you?" I immediately replied. "We will pick you up!" There was no reply.

We waited and waited but nothing. No call. No text. On Wednesday morning, my phone rang. It was Amber. I have never been so happy to hear from someone - "I'm home," she cried.

Amber told me about the man she met online. She told me about her experience in the woods. "He scared me," she shivered, "that's why I texted you."

Our instincts were right. The relationships we form with the youth who walk through our doors are life changing. The youth know us. They trust us. We meet them where they are.