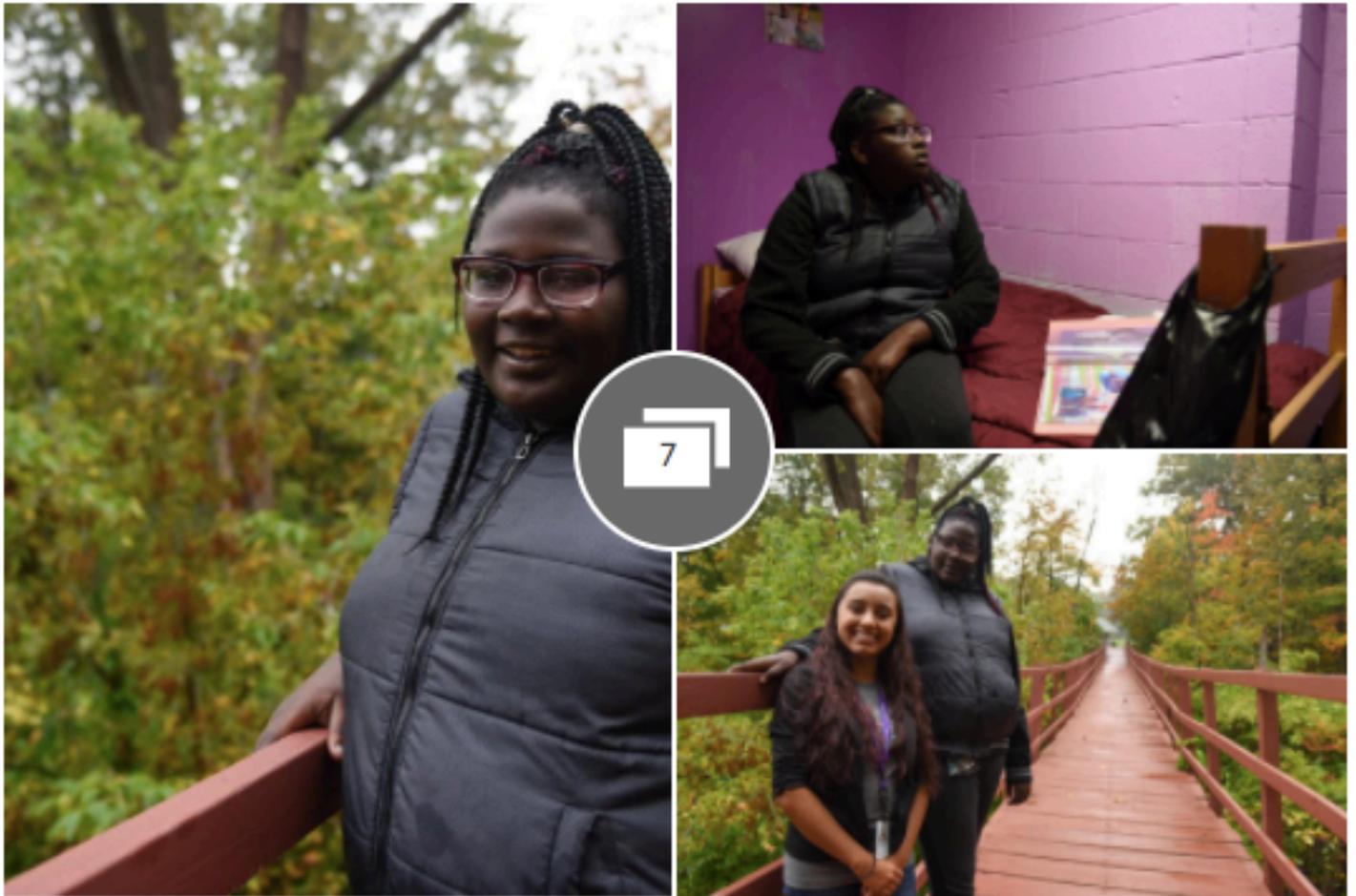




Teen yearns for adoption after watching siblings find new families

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Gallery: 15-year-old Dayjah seeks adoptive family

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*The [Forever Home Run](#), a 5K charity race and 1K "dress-up dash" for kids, raises money for adoption support and therapy while introducing foster children to potential adoptive families. **Where:** Beautiful Savior Lutheran Church, 5631 N. Adams in Bloomfield Hills. **When:** Oct. 14, check-in at 7:30 a.m.; 5K begins at 9 a.m.; awards ceremony at 10:15 a.m. [Full details](#) here.*

FARMINGTON HILLS - On a cinder block wall in a modern orphanage for the cognitively impaired, photos of 15-year-old Dayjah's younger siblings hang above her twin bed.

Colorful letters above the pictures read: "Family wall."

But beyond that handful of images, it's mostly bare.

When asked about her family, Dayjah bows her head while sitting on the edge of her bed. A sadness sweeps over her. She grows quiet.

Of her dozen siblings, three are dead, the rest scattered in separate adoptive homes. Her mother is in prison. The whereabouts of her father - unknown.

Two brothers who were adopted by a Metro Detroit family visit Dayjah occasionally. She cherishes those visits and proudly shows off pictures of her brothers' new lives.

Meanwhile, she waits for a new life of her own, an adoptive family that will care for and love her the way she deserves.

[Fifteen-year-old Dayjah, last of thirteen siblings, awaits adoption](#)

"She thinks about being adopted a lot," said Dayjah's adoption specialist Gabriella Walker, who asked that the teen's last name be withheld.

"Especially seeing her siblings being adopted, it really hurt her when their adoptions were completed last year. She's kind of struggled with that, realizing that she's the only one of her siblings that doesn't have a family."

Unfortunately, there's not a lot of demand for kids like Dayjah.

There is a significant drop-off in adoption interest from prospective parents once a child reaches the age of about 9. Most are seeking younger children, said Lena Wilson, executive director of Samaritas Lutheran Adoption Service.

Lutheran Adoption Services is a nonprofit that partners with Michigan to facilitate adoptions for children removed from their homes, usually due to neglect and abuse.

The group is handling Dayjah's placement, and is hosting an annual fundraiser called [the Forever Home Run](#) on Saturday, Oct. 14.

"Fifteen kids who desperately want to find a family to love them and stand by their side for the rest of their lives will put their best face forward and hope that some of the people attending ... will be interested in bringing them home," the group says.

The event, now in its third year, raises about \$40,000 on average annually. The funds are spent offering adoption services and intensive therapy, support and trauma training for parents who decide to adopt a foster child like Dayjah.

Dayjah's life, so far, has been hell, having endured abuse and abandonment, but nevertheless, she finds small reasons to beam her bright, if reluctant smile.

While she retreats inward around unfamiliar people, warm and frequent hugs envelop those she trusts.

A "gentle giant," is how Walker describes the 5-foot-11 teen.

"She's 15, but emotionally and mentally she functions at about, I'd say, an 8-year-old level, maybe 9," Walker said. " ... She's got a lot of trauma in her background...

"She has a really sweet and soft demeanor ... She likes getting her hair done, her nails painted. She likes to be stylish with her outfits ... a little shy, but she's definitely got a very bright aura."

Dayjah's favorite class is biology. She likes coloring and hunting frogs near the ledge of a nearby creek. She recently caught a praying mantis, won a huge stuffed animal dog at Dave and Busters -- where she celebrated her 15th birthday -- and crocheted a scarf.

She shows off medals won playing Special Olympics softball and soccer. Basketball, she said, is the sport she wants to play next.

Dayjah has dreams that include attending Central Michigan University and someday becoming a pediatrician.

She was removed from her home in Ypsilanti, separated from her mother and siblings, in 2013, after her mother, drunk and on painkillers, crashed her minivan into the rear of a parked pickup truck.

Dayjah was critically injured, but recovered. Her 6-week-old brother, who was not secured properly, died.

Her mother, now 41, was sentenced to between four and 15 years prison on convictions of second-degree child abuse, driving on a suspended license causing death and driving while intoxicated causing death. She was subsequently charged and convicted on several counts of uttering and publishing for forging bad checks in Ann Arbor.

She'll be eligible for release from prison in November 2018.

After being removed from her mother's custody, Dayjah was placed in foster care with relatives, where she was again abused, according to Wilson.

She lived in another residential facility before moving to the New Directions residential foster home in Farmington Hills earlier this year.

The cinder-block-lined hallways of Dayjah's dormitory more closely resemble those of a halfway house or shelter than a home. The entrance door warns that the alarm is set each night at 9 p.m. There is round-the-clock supervision and a day room for the seven girls currently living there - all with special needs.

But outside the somewhat clinical living quarters is a serene, wooded landscape, complete with an elevated walking bridge that crosses high above a quaint stream that trickles between two bluffs.

While crossing the rain-slicked bridge last week, Dayjah shuffled slowly, occasionally moving her sneakers back and forth like windshield wipers across the moist wooden planks, testing her footing before each uncertain step.

Dayjah's slowly overcoming her fear of heights. She has little choice. The cafeteria is on the opposite side of the ravine.

Her purple and black braids -- the purple matching the tinted frames of her glasses -- sway with each nervous advance, rustling her puffy black nylon vest.

Dayjah has good reason not to trust, not just that bridge, but everything.

If parents are to be our guardians, to shelter us from life's harshest realities for as long as we are children, Dayjah was failed miserably.

There is no one in Dayjah's life to assure her that her next step will be a safe one -- at least not yet.

Visit [Lutheran Adoption Service](#) for more information about adopting or becoming a foster parent.