

Diane Niehaus



- 4 years
- 1 case
- 2 kids

Four years ago, Diane took her first case as a ProKids CASA volunteer. When she met Nadia, she was a quiet, guarded 15-year-old. Petite, with ash blonde hair, Nadia had been living with an aunt.

She and her three siblings had moved there after years of abuse and neglect. Then their mother had gone to jail on drug charges and their father had died of a drug overdose.

But the aunt's home was not any better for Nadia. She was abused there as well and moved to a foster home, separated from her siblings.

The facts were "horrible," says volunteer GAL Melissa Moeddel, who supported Diane on the case. But Diane was the right person for Nadia. Calm. Able to have hard conversations. Patient.

And Diane needed a lot of that. It was obvious that Nadia had Reactive Attachment Disorder – known as RAD – so it was hard for her to let others get close. But because Diane was there month after month, year after year, Diane was able to advocate for Nadia.

As Diane got to know Nadia, she saw the potential in her. At school, for example, Nadia was a gifted student on the honor roll. She was a talented saxophonist in the marching band. Diane knew that Nadia could rise to the challenges before her. She needed support to deal with some of the demons from a life filled with trauma and rejection.

As Diane got to know Nadia, Nadia opened up. Diane understood that Nadia needed normalcy and independence. She supported Nadia as she

got her driver's license and a job – which most foster children never get to experience. As Nadia became more confident, however, she began to rebel against her foster mother. "She was starting to advocate for herself," Diane says. "Her confidence was really growing." While it was a healthy kind of rebellion, it strained her relationship with her foster mother and could have impacted her placement for the last six months of her senior year.

Diane saw Nadia needed some tough love to get through the end of high school. Diane pulled together a meeting at ProKids with herself, Nadia, the foster mother and the mentor who was helping Nadia apply for college.

"No one could have done that but Diane," Melissa says. "Nadia had the drive to make things happen. But Diane was her quarterback. She got everything in place."

By the end of the meeting, Nadia understood that blowing her placement would not help her move forward.

Nadia is now a freshman at Morehead State University. She wants to be a genetic counselor someday. She talks to Diane as she navigates living in a dorm and getting through her classes. "She is sweet. Humble. A hard worker," Diane says. "For the abuse that she endured, it is amazing that she is not bitter."

Diane "shined a great light for this girl," Melissa says. "She didn't know what a healthy female adult looked like until she met Diane. And because Diane honored Nadia's hard work and encouraged her to achieve, she became the first in her family to graduate from high school!"

93% of ProKids children receive the educational services they need or achieve their developmental milestones.

Only 58% of foster children ever finish high school.