

# TARA MAYOLE

I am originally from Long, Island, NY, but Arizona has been my home since high school. I earned my BA in Elementary Ed from ASU and a Masters Degree in Educational Leadership from NAU. I believe each one of us is born with gifts and hearts that take us to where we belong. My heart and gift is speaking for children, teaching children and advocating for them.

I taught 5-8 grades for 14 years in Phoenix, as well as taught in the Masters Degree program for the University of Phoenix. I eventually pursued a place in school administration because I saw a need for better leadership in our schools. I was a principal for 10 years in Arizona, and during this time a young student caught my attention. I knew there was something wrong, she was wearing a huge jacket that was soiled, hair unkempt and there was a sadness surrounding her.

Eventually this child came to me and reported abuse. As a mandated reporter, I called DCS. She was on her way to foster care when I hesitated, not sure why to this day, but I asked if I could care for her until she could be placed with family. I was vetted, and she was able to be with me the next day.

Due to none of her extended family being deemed qualified to care for her, and her severe trauma and other issues, she was eventually placed with at trauma trained foster mom.

I wondered about her all the time and then she contacted me. She was 16 and she had been in foster homes for years, she was finally placed with one Aunt. Sadly, her Aunt put her back in foster care because of too many behavior challenges.

Previous to her contact, I was serving as a voluntary member of the Foster Care Review Board. As I sat in the meetings, I kept hearing about the many teens in foster care vs younger children. I wanted to do more than review cases. I wanted to help one of these kids. Ironically, I left the Board right before this student contacted me.

Then came Falaya DeSilva, the group home director of the home she was living and Casey Allen, her case manager. From here, our story will be told.

I have been asked why in the world are you going to bring a child, a teen mind you, into your home who has so many challenges after you just retired and can now relax and travel.

My answer was, "I guess my heart is much bigger than my brain." My heart has always had a soft spot for the innocent, those without voices or those who are not equipped to advocate for themselves. I am their voice when they cannot speak or articulate or know what they deserve. I am passionate about children being treated well, cared for and having a safe place to be a child.

