

Remarks Submitted by

David Shelley

Pennsylvania Boys & Girls Club's

Youth of the Year

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"She chose drugs over my sister and me." However, I am not a victim!

My name is David Shelly those were my words to Bob Bechtold of Sarah Heinz House Boys and Girls Club four years ago.

Many people would consider me a victim, having to grow up with two drug abusing parents, a mother who abandoned her children for a life of drugs, having lived in four different households in over two years time, and having to raise my younger sister during my early teens. However, let me say again, I'm not a victim; I stand before you as a proud product of the after school programs of Boys and Girls Club of America.

Four years ago, I was 16 and forced to make the toughest decision of my life. My mother was hosting a drug party at our house and I was concerned not only for her safety, but the safety of my sister and me. I quickly got my sister out of the house and took her to the neighbor's and then called 911 on my own mom. My stepfather picked up my sister and I while my mom's so called "friends" were arrested and she was taken to a mental hospital. It was the worst night of my life, but I finally felt at peace with myself.

As everything was falling apart at my mom's house, Sarah Heinz House, one of the strongest after school programs in the Pittsburgh area had become my safe place. The staff and the volunteers quickly filled in the emotional gaps of my childhood and provided many escapes through personal relationships and positive after school programs.

Kid's words, especially when we are upset, are frequently dismissed as a passing thingsomething we'll grow out of. The staff at the club listened to me and validated me. They provided moral support, a way to and from the club, and even offered their home as a safe place to stay. They never looked down at me because of my family; instead, they helped and guided me as one of their own children. Perhaps most importantly they never allowed me to use my situation as an excuse for failure.

Now an alumni, I was a member of the club for nine years now. In that time I have developed an interest and talent in the technology field. Sarah Heinz House has a partnership with the Carnegie Mellon University's robotics program. I teach younger kids at the club about robotics and that has triggered my pursuit of computer science and education in college.

Earlier I had stated that I stand before you as a proud product of Boys and Girls Club of America. That stands true only because one thing remained a constant in my life, Sarah Heinz House Boys and Girls Club. A place that I first looked at as an after school hangout place, developed in to my second home.

Like all other after school programs the goal of Sarah Heinz House is to develop and polish young individuals for success, and as you can see those goals and values that the club taught me after school still hold strong in my everyday life.

After school programs are a necessity of every neighborhood and community for many reasons. They keep kids off of the streets and prevent them from becoming victims of society. Strong after school programs prepare children for the very demanding world today, where post high school education is nearly vital for any means of success.

I'm real excited about my future in college. I know I can handle whatever life throws my way and I know I will always have the constant support of my club. The after school programs of Boys and Girls Club of America has helped mold me into the man that I am today and has given me the courage to accept the things I cannot change. Winston Churchill said it, Heinz House embedded it: "Success is never final, Failure is never fatal, it's courage that counts!"