



author, poet Children's Literature Legacy medal winner nikkigrimes.com

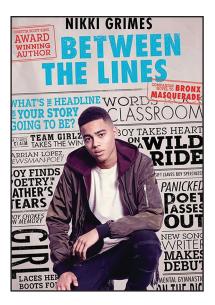
Foster Kids Resource List

I hope you enjoyed *Between the Lines*. As in *Bronx Masquerade*, this novel explores the lives of many different characters. Right now, I want to focus on just one of them: Jenesis Whyte.

I spent several years in the foster care system when I was young, and as a result, I am especially sensitive to the incredible challenges experienced by teens who age out of the foster care system after their eighteenth birthday.



On the streets of New York City, looking as lost as I felt.



"I finished high school in a foster home and the day after graduation, I had to get an apartment and move out."

—Christine Kohler

"I spent my childhood often feeling like an unwelcome guest in someone else's home. Once I aged out of foster care, I knew it was up to me to make the choices that would result in the kind of life I would have. I didn't feel ready, and I often felt alone."

—Nikki Barthelmess

Page 1. *Between The Lines,* written by Nikki Grimes, published by Nancy Paulsen Books, Penguin Random House, 2018. ISBN 978-0399246883. "Foster Kids Resource List," copyright Nikki Grimes. If you would like to share it, please do, but give credit to Nikki Grimes and her book *Between the Lines*. **nikkigrimes.com**

Have you ever faced anything like this? Would you know what to do if you did?

I was fortunate. I didn't end up on the streets, like so many former foster kids do, but I did sleep on a lot of floors, and my older sister slept on her fair share of park benches. Lots of former foster kids experience much worse, and since *Between the Lines* is a novel about teens, I wanted to take the opportunity to shine a light on this subject. I did so through the story of Jenesis Whyte, the character in foster care who will soon age out of the system.

There are teens like Nikki Barthelmess, like Christine Kohler, and like the fictional Jenesis Whyte on nearly every high school campus across the country.

As friend and former emergency foster mom Bobi Martin said, "That absolutely sucks. How does a kid relish the success of graduation – a milestone – if he or she is terrified of the day after?"

Like most teens in foster care, Jenesis faced the very real possibility of becoming homeless once her foster care status was terminated at age eighteen. As a consequence, she was at risk of becoming vulnerable to the dangers of human trafficking and the ravages of the sex trade.

The statistics for former foster kids are alarming. 50-70% of former foster youth become homeless. 25% of the young men end up incarcerated, and the young women are 6x as likely to have babies before the age of twenty-one. In other words, the odds are very much stacked against these teens.

If foster teens are to beat the odds, they need help.

"I wasn't terrified. It was just a fact of life. During the transition time between high school and when I married, I lived in 7 different places, worked 6 jobs, and went to two schools—university and cosmetology school. I would have been on the streets more if it hadn't been for times I did free services, like day care, in exchange for a place to stay."

—Christine Kohler

"I made mistakes. There were times when I feared I wouldn't amount to anything or felt I was unworthy of happiness, but I had faith in God that He would watch out for me. There were days of just putting one foot in front of the other."

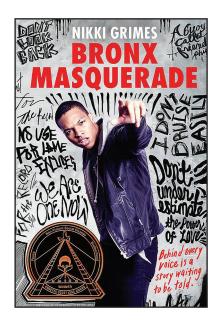
—Nikki Barthelmess

"I remember scrambling to find a place fast. I ended up answering an ad in a newspaper for a roommate."

—Christine Kohler

"Children's Cabinet in Reno helped me. I ended up okay—better than okay."

—Nikki Barthelmess



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DETAILS

What kind of services are out there? Here's information about two of the organizations dedicated to serving young men and women transitioning out of foster care:

Inspire Life Skills Training, Inc.

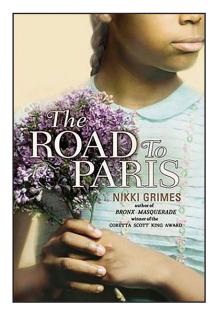
This is one of the organizations that offers critical assistance to former foster youth in need. That's why I mentioned them, briefly, at the end of the novel, as a ray of hope for the Jenesis Whyte character. Jenesis may be a work of fiction, but thankfully, Inspire is not. With six single-family homes scattered throughout Southern California's Inland Empire, Inspire's services include:

- Providing Affordable Housing for low/moderate income
- Full-Time Education/Job Training
- Life Skills Training
- Part-time Employment
- Mentoring
- Access to Profession Counseling & Medical Care

Those who successfully complete the program go on to attend, and graduate from college or vocational school, enter the job market, and establish their own financial independence. All it takes is a deep desire, hard work, and a little help from some friends. Inspire Life Skills Training, Inc., is based in Southern California, but there are other organizations across the nation focused on meeting the needs of former foster youth.

Alternatives for Girls

Alternatives for Girls helps homeless and highrisk girls and young women avoid violence, teen pregnancy, and exploitation, and helps them to explore and access the support, resources, and opportunities necessary to be safe, to grow strong, and to make positive choices in their lives.





This is me, age 16. In just two years, I would be out on my own. Ready or not.

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LOOKING TO THE FUTURE

Are you a teen about to age out of the foster care system? When that happens, what will you do? The time to start asking questions is now, before it happens. One way to prepare for the challenges ahead is to learn about what resources are available to you, and to plan how best to use them. Consider reaching out to one of these organizations for help. Offering you help is the reason they exist.

- Inspire Life Skills Training
- <u>Aging Out Institute</u>
- <u>Alternatives for Girls</u>
- Annie E. Casey Foundation
- <u>Aspiranet.org</u>
- <u>Beacon Interfaith</u>
- Biddy Mason Charitable Foundation
- <u>Children's Cabinet</u>
- <u>Community Youth Services</u>
- <u>Covenant House</u>
- Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption
- Foster Care to Success
- <u>Foster Club</u>
- Olive Crest
- Rowell's Foster Children's Positive Plan
- <u>Teen Project</u>
- <u>US Dept of Health and Human Services</u>
- Y2Y Harvard Square

These are just a few of the organizations waiting to give you a hand up.

Asking for help to transition can be difficult, I know. But if you get that help, you'll be doing us all a favor because, frankly, the world needs the gifts you have to offer.

By the way, Nikki Barthelmess is now a successful freelance writer and Christine Kohler is a popular author of books for children and young adults. I'm doing okay, too.

Stay strong.



With my foster brothers, Kendall and Brad.



Years later, Kendall helped me celebrate when I received the Children's Literature Legacy Award in 2017.

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