

Twin brothers walk across US for kids

Hope to raise awareness about foster care system

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Davon and Tavon Woods are walking – and talking – for kids who can't speak for themselves.

The twin brothers have taken walking trips for the last two years, hoping to raise awareness about the foster care system in the U.S. and how it all too often fails children when they need help the most.

They know about those failures firsthand. They were each 2 pounds at birth, born to a mother who was addicted to drugs and didn't realize she was pregnant (let alone with twins). After an emergency cesarean section, they were taken from her and placed with a loving foster family for the first two years of their lives.

But what should have been a happy childhood was anything but. Though they later found out the foster family tried to adopt them, they were instead placed and then adopted by another family, one that was not so loving.

Making his way through Maryland on their current walk from their hometown of Sumter, South Carolina, to Philadelphia, Davon Woods remembered feeling like the twins' new family "did it for the money," adopting children who had been in foster care so they could collect financial assistance. The South Carolina family adopted as many as 15 children over the years the twins lived with them, Davon said, but treated them all more like servants than family, in a household that was "more like a group home."

"There was a lot of yelling at us, never any affection," he said. "We never heard, 'We love you.'"

'No one is marching' for foster children

According to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Children's Bureau, there were 606,031 children served by the foster care system nationwide in 2021, 63% of whom were placed



Davon and Tavon Woods are seen outside Roanoke Rapids, N.C. The brothers are walking the country to raise awareness about the hardships of kids in foster care. PROVIDED BY DAVON WOODS

because of neglect in their family of origin.

The Annie E. Casey Foundation, a child welfare-focused nonprofit, says that 1 in 5 children who have been in foster care report experiencing homelessness from the ages of 19 to 21, and 1 in 5 report being incarcerated. Just 57% of 21-year-olds who have been in foster care said they are employed (full or part time).

And there are horror stories, too: Foster children who are abused, trafficked or even killed.

"What goes on in the foster system isn't talked about enough," Woods said. "You see other causes, people come together and protest and organize marches and put up billboards."

"But when it comes to kids in foster care, no one is putting their faces on a billboard. No one is marching for them, so we decided to start walking."

Twins advocating for kids caught in a 'broken' system

Debra Kenyon met the twins a couple of years ago. She lives in California's

Central Valley and is a business owner, but she has also worked with troubled children. She was moved by the twins' desire to help children and has assisted with a Kicks for Kids event they organized to get nice, new sneakers for children who often have to settle for the cheapest shoes foster parents can find.

"Some kids just need a stern word, but also a hug," she said.

"A lot of kids are neglected and ignored. The system is broken and sometimes kids get pushed aside, like Tavon and Davon. They didn't deserve to grow up the way they did, but they've taken that adversity and turned it into something that is helping others. The love they've shown is very touching to me. I admire them."

Both twins quit their jobs – Davon found success in auto sales, Tavon was a truck driver – and started their first walk with little more than an idea: to rely on the kindness of others and to talk to anyone who would listen about children in foster care and the challenges they face, both while they're in the system and afterward, whether they're adopted or they age out of foster care.

They have set up a website, Foster Kids Matter, to track their travels and have been featured on local newscasts and "Good Morning America." They offer merchandise and rely on online fundraisers to pay for each walk. They'll pick a route, walk several miles a day, and hope to eventually mark 20 miles in each of the 50 states.

Brothers hope to open a transitional home

As they have traveled, the two have hosted events and stopped at group homes and institutions to talk to kids in foster care, a reminder to kids who often feel forgotten that someone is paying attention. The twins are hoping to eventually open a transitional home to help young people as they age out of foster care.

Now 28, the twins were told very little as children about their past, something that's complicated their present. They found a family member while seniors in high school, in the form of a cousin who told them they looked a lot like one of his relatives. They knew their original last name, Jacobs, and the connection was made.

Meeting their family "wasn't what we expected," and it's not uncommon for adoptees to have complicated emotions. "We weren't receiving love from our adoptive family, and then we wait all these years and it's like another slap in the face," Woods said.

"The foster system is good and bad, but a lot of people want to know why we always talk about the bad," Woods said. "It's because I only saw the bad."

Having a twin has been a blessing in what for many kids can be a lonely existence, even if the two occasionally butt heads – especially while walking for miles a day, living sometimes out of a cramped Mustang and sometimes out of a motel room.

"(Tavon) was the only blood I ever knew," Davon said. "At the end of the day, it's always been me, Tavon and God, and I always knew God had a plan for our life: To turn all that hurt and anger around and to be a voice for kids and adults who've been in foster care system."