

Calling His Shot

Damonte Takes Aim
at the Future



CHAMPION

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Damonte and his UMFS foster parent Ms. Pam

Damonte stood at midcourt and worked patiently to perfect a backwards over-the-shoulders shot. He must have heaved the basketball into the air 20 times, and 20 times the ball missed its mark. But Damonte didn't get frustrated. Instead, he made adjustments. Finally, the basketball banked in. "That's the only trick shot I practice," Damonte said with a smile.

The saying goes, "You miss 100 percent of the shots you don't take." And that's what makes Damonte a great basketball player and person: He's willing to take the shots. Damonte knows that in life, just like in sports, you must be resilient and work hard to achieve your goals.

Damonte was 8 years when his mother made the difficult decision to place him and his siblings in foster care. Their father had passed away, and his mother wanted to ensure her children would be well cared for. "I was too young to know what to do," Damonte recalled. "So, I said, 'OK, I'm in foster care. It might be a long time until I see my mom again, but I'm going to do everything I can to make her proud and have a good future.'"

Now 18, Damonte has undoubtedly made his mother proud. He's in regular communication with her, as well as his siblings, many of whom have aged out of foster care. Damonte has opted to remain in foster care through a program called Fostering Futures. The decision to remain in care, Damonte said, doesn't change how he feels about his mom. "I love my family," he said.

In June, Damonte will graduate from high school. On the weekends, he serves up fresh pizzas with extra cheese and meat (his favorite). He loves the job. And when he's not at school, work, or shooting hoops, Damonte lends a hand at church, where he's a favorite among parishioners.

"Damonte pulls out the trash on Thursdays, and he helps the older folks," said Ms. Pam, a longtime UMFS foster parent who's been caring for Damonte the last four years. "People at our church lean on him and his strength."

"I just like to help people," Damonte said. "It's always been my

thing, even if I don't know the person."

Damonte is making his own way and leaving a lasting impression on everyone he meets, which certainly includes Ms. Pam. She said it warms her heart to see how much he's grown since his freshman year, and she's proud of the way he's maintained a relationship with his birth mother while also choosing his own path. "I am a Christian," Ms. Pam said. "And caring for young people in foster care requires prayer and showing them a different road. All you have to do is present it, and it's Damonte's choice which way to go."

As a foster parent, Ms. Pam said she has a responsibility to practice selflessness as she guides Damonte to build skills and pursue his interests. "Being a foster parent is not about me at all, it's about the child," she said.

Those sentiments have resonated with Damonte. "Ms. Pam taught me how to live life and how to live it properly," he said. "I just want to thank her."

Foster care is sometimes a necessary support, but that doesn't mean the birth family isn't involved. "Damonte's mom has been a part of his life," Ms. Pam said. "The good, the bad, the ugly. She's been there."

The combined support from Ms. Pam and his mother has benefited Damonte tremendously. And just like he worked so

hard to make a backwards over-the-shoulder basket, he exercises the same diligence in life and will soon begin working on his next shot when he moves to a new loving foster home this summer.

"Damonte said he wanted to graduate high school from my house before moving on," Ms. Pam said. "That is my greatest joy, because I feel like I walked him to the end of the rainbow."

"Sometimes it's hard to let go of the person who took care of you the longest," Damonte said of leaving Ms. Pam's care. "But sometimes you have to move on in life and take another big step into the future." ●

There are more than 5,000 young people in foster care in Virginia. You can help. If you'd like to learn more about becoming a foster parent, visit UMFS.org/foster. If you'd like to make a gift to support youth in foster care, visit UMFS.org/donate.



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- Damonte

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