***From Intern to Advocate: Gratitude and Growth at Youth Crossroads***

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Today, I started a group for newcomers at Heritage Middle School, which made me realize my full circle at Youth Crossroads. It was such a nostalgic feeling to be on the facilitator side of running the group after being in the student's seat just a few years ago. It made me realize my gratitude toward YC and their cooperation in helping me become who I am today.

Reflecting on my time here, I can see how every experience, challenge, and lesson has shaped me professionally and individually. Youth Crossroads offered me a place to build my confidence and practice my skills, but, more importantly, it gave me the support system and mentorship that allowed me to grow and be in this position as a clinical social work intern.

As I learned to listen, support, and advocate for others, I found my voice and purpose within this field. I am grateful for the mentors and staff who guided me, showing me the delicate balance between empathy and professionalism. They taught me how to listen without judgment, offer support without overshadowing someone's autonomy, and approach every situation with curiosity and learning. These lessons have been invaluable, especially as I now guide and advocate for others.

My experience as a girl's group participant at Youth Crossroads profoundly impacts how I now serve the youth I work with. Having been in their position not long ago, I remember the importance of feeling genuinely supported, understood, and encouraged by people who cared about my growth—especially the Youth Crossroads social worker at the time, Claudia, who made a lasting impact on me. Today, as I work with the newcomers' group, I see how creating a safe, welcoming space can inspire young people to open up, share their stories, and take meaningful steps toward their growth. I strive to offer them the same guidance and encouragement I once received, hoping they'll feel empowered to overcome challenges and recognize their potential. Every interaction becomes a chance to give back, sharing the impact Youth Crossroads had on me and helping others build a foundation for their success.