

# Gazillion Voices

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## VOICES WITH VISION

COVER



What does it say about the foster care system when a judge assigns a volunteer to a floundering case in hopes that the volunteer will help find a child a permanent home, educational opportunities, and medical services? As a Court Appointed Special Advocate, that is exactly what I do and this film was born directly from my experiences.

After three years working with a developmentally delayed child, Ana (named changed), I picked up my phone to hear a little voice saying "Ma-Ma." This was Ana's first word and her foster mother had called me, her advocate, to share the experience. Yet, I wondered. If it took years to hear the voice of one child, how long would it take to hear all of the voices of the more than 400,000 foster care children in the United States?

I decided to answer this question using the tools I knew best – art, animation, and film. Foster youth often have a blank slate in their lives: when names, addresses, homes, and schools are a blur; when there's no one to take home videos or photos of them; or when there's no one to save school projects and old report cards. As an animator, I wanted to use animation to fill this blank canvas and recreate youth's memories; to give foster youth a voice by allowing them to share their stories.

I reached out to foster youth via social media and received an overwhelming response. It became even more apparent to me that foster youth wanted to be heard. After a few months, I had collected far more stories than I could possibly fit into a single film. So, as interest grew, the project grew with it.

Now, 2 years later, I'm collaborating with others to create an **animated documentary film** plus a series of live-action documentary shorts profiling individual youth's journeys through the foster care system. Current and former foster youth are participating behind the scenes, as well as in front of the camera. Some are finding their voice through storytelling, music, and writing, while others are helping as

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camera operators and production assistants. Our goal is to use the film-making process to inspire foster youth and spark change in the foster care community.

About her participation in the project, Charell Star Charleston, one of our interviewees, states: "Being a former foster kid comes with a lot of stigmas and labels that are usually assigned by people who have never known what it is like to be in such a challenging situation. Over the years, I've fielded some tough questions about my background and some hurtful glances, but taking part in this project has been a way for me to help re-frame the conversation."

On Dec. 9 at "[Voices with Vision: Affecting Change in Foster Care](#)," Charell's story will be featured in a preview screening of our first [live-action short film](#). Because our primary goal is to give foster youth a voice, this screening will be followed by a foster youth panel and open discussion, both presented by the Bat Haus Film Club in Brooklyn, NY. The event is designed to celebrate the achievements of the project's foster youth collaborators while giving attendees the opportunity to act on the stories they hear and the change they want to see.



We're also [fundraising](#) to purchase duffel bags for foster youth because Charell and many of our other interviewees talk about the indignity they've repeatedly faced when their belongings are thrown in trash bags as they transition from one home to another. With Together We Rise, we're giving our audience the chance to be active participants in changing the lives of foster youth.

Since starting on this project, we've had the opportunity to speak in the NYC Family Court system and have had the privilege of working with foster care reform advocates, like Sixto Cancel, and mentor champions Sheila Jaffe and Darryl McDaniels. Darryl and Sixto are just two of the people showcased in our online series called "Snapshots," available now on [YouTube](#) and offered below for your convenience.

As Darryl says in one "Snapshots" clip, mentoring can change a life. Being a volunteer advocate certainly changed mine, and I hope this project is as meaningful for our foster youth collaborators.

~ Yasmin Mistry

### About Yasmin Mistry:

Yasmin Mistry is an Emmy-nominated designer and animator based out of Brooklyn, NY. Her work has been displayed in exhibitions, film festivals, and design publication worldwide including recent showings at the United Nations and the Louvre.

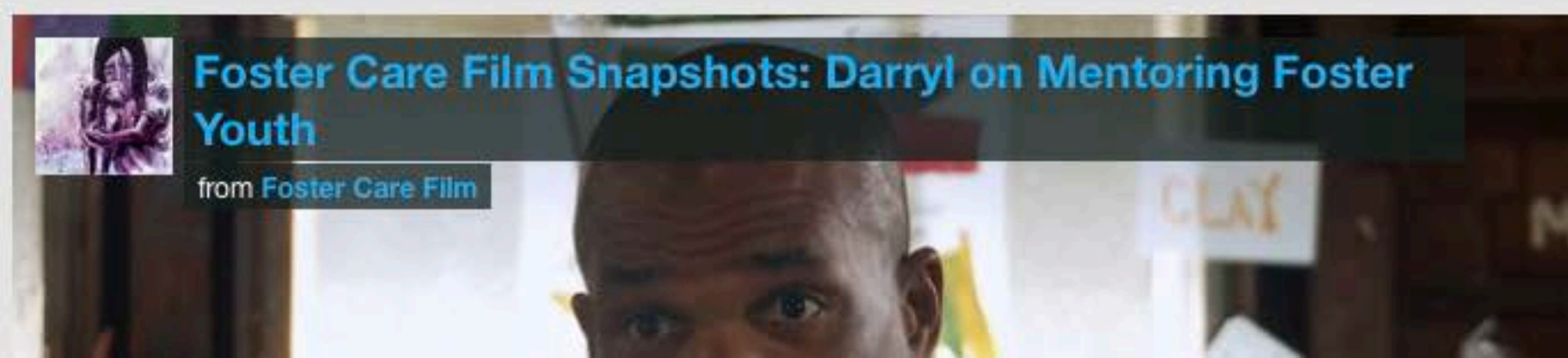
When not working as an artist, Yasmin dedicates her time to the foster care children of New York City. As a Court Appointed Special Advocate, she received the 2012 Advocate of The Year Award for her dedication to getting services for foster care children with special needs. Yasmin was inspired to create this film when she realized the voices of the children she worked with were not being heard and their stories never told.

Yasmin enjoys working on documentaries and has created graphics for films featured at numerous film festivals, including the Tribeca Film Festival, Cannes, SXSW, and Michael Moore's Traverse City Film Festival. In addition, her first short film, Visions Revealed, an animated short about performing arts in the deaf community, premiered at SIGGRAPH Metro-CAF and went on to be screened at festivals world-wide, including Deaf Arts Now! International Film Festival, the Big Mini DV Festival, and the Red Stick International Film Festival. You can view her professional vita and portfolio at <http://www.idesygn.com>.

### Snapshots



Foster Care Film Snapshots: Charell on Friendship from Foster Care Film on Vimeo.





Foster Care Film Snapshots: Darryl on Mentoring Foster Youth from Foster Care Film on Vimeo.



Foster Care Film Snapshots: Exavier Pope on Appreciation from Foster Care Film on Vimeo.



Foster Care Film Snapshots: Juliet Forde on Tenacity from Foster Care Film on Vimeo.



Foster Care Film Snapshots: Juliet on Perspective from Foster Care Film on Vimeo.



## Foster Care Film Snapshots: Camilla on Stability

from Foster Care Film

SNAPSHOTS  
\\ STABILITY



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Foster Care Film Snapshots: Camilla on Stability from Foster Care Film on Vimeo.