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With his mother's death, this teen's family was broken apart. Now, he has a new home.

By [Keith L. Alexander](#) November 18



DeMarco Nicholson, 19, will be adopted by his childhood neighbor, Kim Harvey, as part of D.C. Superior Court's annual Adoption Day. (Linda Davidson/The Washington Post)

Where was ya'll at when my mom was daily strugglin'. Where was ya'll at when my mom needed some help. Momma told me I was going to be the best in the industry. I'm gonna make my momma proud. Where was ya'll at?

— DeMarco Nicholson

LaTisha Nicholson was determined to keep her family together. The single mom and her three children were often homeless, living in various shelters across the city.

Things were looking up in 2014, when Nicholson got a job as a home health-care aide and then found an apartment in Southeast Washington. Then a new baby came along. But days later, DeMarco Nicholson, the oldest of her children, found his mother lifeless in a bathtub. She had died of heart failure at 34.

The fragile family was broken. DeMarco's infant brother went to live with his father. His sisters, then ages 10 and 13, moved to their father's house.

At first DeMarco, whose father had never been involved in his life, stayed with an aunt. But the two got into such an argument that she called the police, and he was taken to a youth group home.

Now 19, DeMarco has finally found a new family that welcomed him into their home — and helps him stay close with his biological siblings. On Saturday in D.C. Superior Court, he will be among 29 children and teens whose adoptions will be finalized as part of the court's annual Adoption Day.

While he was in the group home, DeMarco reached out to one of his mother's friends. The woman he knew as "Ms. Kim" had lived across the hall when the Nicholsons were renting the Southeast Washington apartment.

Kim Harvey, a single mother of four children ages 8, 9, 13 and 15, eventually decided to take DeMarco in as her own son. The family shares a three-bedroom apartment with a Yorkie named Gucci.

Harvey, 34, said the past two years have been tough for DeMarco, dealing not only with the loss of his mother but the memory of finding her body.



Latisha Nicholson (Family photo)

“I was scared. I didn’t know what to do, I was lost,” DeMarco said one recent afternoon as he sat in the living room, nervously twisting his high-top faded hair between his fingers. “She knows what I’m going through,” he said, speaking of Harvey.

“He was angry and was still grieving,” Harvey added.

DeMarco doesn’t talk much about the pain, he said. When he wants to express himself, he puts it to beats with rap lyrics.

All that I want is to ball like a wizard. Momma told me to chase a dream. Lost my mom when I was 17. My momma want to see me graduate. My auntie want to see me graduate. My sisters want to see me levitate. Watch me sit back and just meditate. Stuck in dump with a lot of pain. Missing my momma straight through my vein.

Adopting a 19-year-old is far from unique in the District. Local adoption advocates say that for many parents looking to adopt, older children are preferred, especially for adults with little time for toilet training, day care and other tasks associated with infants and young children. Foster children

can be adopted until the age of 21, at which point they age out of District services.

Of the 86 children and youths in the District waiting to be adopted, 22 of them are between the ages of 15 and 21, according to statistics provided by the District's Child and Family Services Agency. The District's largest age group, with 33 waiting to be adopted, is composed of infants to 7-year-olds.

For DeMarco and his new family, the transition hasn't always been easy. DeMarco shares a room with Harvey's oldest son, who was a friend before he became an adopted brother. Like most teenagers, DeMarco can be moody and a little defiant.

"He's a handful," Harvey said with a slight laugh. "He can be mouthy, and we get into it. But if I'm not there for him, he doesn't have anybody."

Harvey and DeMarco's mother were close friends. Harvey still has a Facebook message that Nicholson posted in April 2014, a month before she died. In the message, Nicholson asked Harvey to tell DeMarco, who had fallen asleep playing video games with Harvey's son, to come home after he awoke. "U can send ur other son over when he get up. lol," she wrote.



Nicholson and Harvey, a single mother of four children ages 8, 9, 13 and 15, in the living room of the apartment they share with a Yorkie named Gucci. (Photo by Linda Davidson/The Washington Post)

Harvey works as a security officer with the District’s Consumer and Regulatory Affairs Department, and describes herself as a “mean momma bear.” When DeMarco — who has been diagnosed with a learning disability — came home from school recently and told her a teacher called him “stupid” she marched down to the school to confront the teacher.

Harvey recently made sure DeMarco had identification to carry in his wallet. She gives him an allowance, as she does for other children. And, she said, she is hoping he can get a part-time job on weekends or after school “to teach him responsibility and to prepare him for 21.”

Harvey’s goal is to keep DeMarco and his siblings together. So on the weekends and during the summers, his brother and sisters come to visit, and her apartment is brimming with kids.

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“I don’t want him and his siblings separated. That is not what LaTisha would want,” Harvey said. “I’m just doing my best.”

DeMarco, who carries a photo of his mother in his cellphone, wants to be a rapper and possibly attend community college. But in the near term, graduating high school next year is the priority.

“My momma wanted me to graduate,” he said.

“And I’m picking up where she left off,” Harvey added.

And now I know a lot of people don’t want to see me make it. But guess what, I’m going to make it woah. If you got a moment to achieve. All you got to do is just believe. And watch I chase that green like they leaves. Please don’t make these wrong plays in these cold streets.