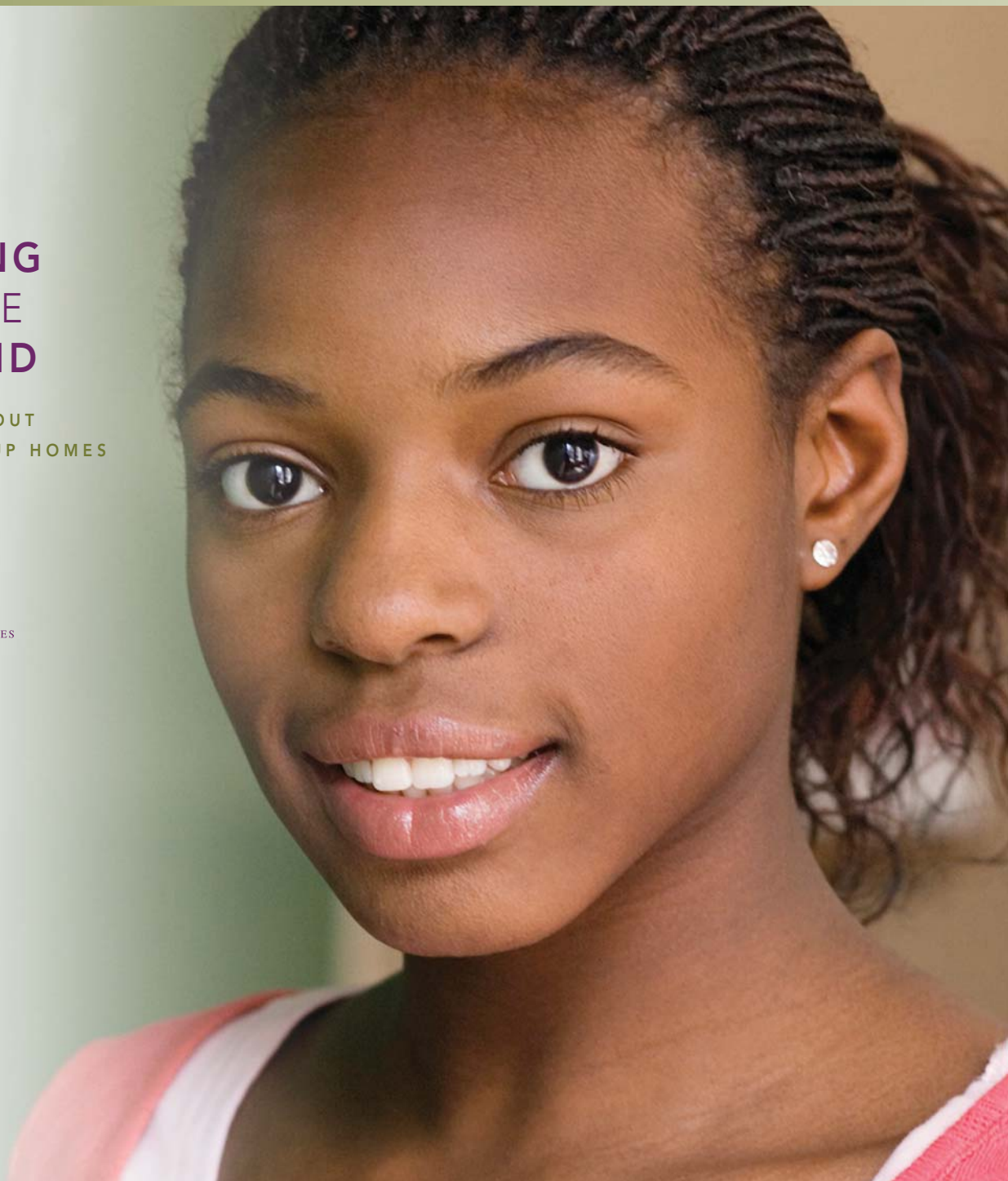


**TURNING  
MY LIFE  
AROUND**

A STORY ABOUT  
ADOLESCENT GROUP HOMES



CHILDREN'S AID  
AND FAMILY SERVICES





*The agency has five therapeutic group homes for children and adolescents who are healing from the emotional wounds caused by abuse, and are not ready to live with a family. The group homes are staffed by caring professionals, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, who make sure the children attend school every day, eat meals regularly, and get to their medical and therapy appointments. The group homes offer a highly structured and safe place to live, helping each child to begin the difficult task of trusting again, and living in a family-like environment.*

*Monique is a former resident of Woodlea, the agency's group home for teenage girls in Ridgewood. Now 25 years old, she remembers her experiences in the story that follows.*

I spent most of my childhood in my grandmother's cramped one-bedroom apartment. My mom struggled with addiction and was in and out of my life – sometimes I'd go months at a time without seeing her. I was left with my grandmother who was supposed to care for me, but she was very sick, and wasn't able to give me the love and attention I needed. Plus, she had to take care of my cousins, who were also abandoned by their mom, my aunt. It wasn't a good place for a kid to live – it was too crowded, and there was no one to supervise all of us. As a result, I was neglected and abused.

When I was 11, I called a state childcare worker myself, and asked to be removed from my grandmother's home. After several failed foster placements, I was referred to Woodlea. Though it took some time, I was able to open up to the staff and my newly made friends. The staff was always available to talk, and encouraged me all the time; they really helped me come out of my shell. They also made me feel cared for and secure.

I've come a long way since then. I graduated from high school and pursued my dream of going to college, thanks to the help of more than \$10,000 in scholarships, including a monthly stipend for rent and living expenses from Children's Aid and Family Services' Thomas R. Burgin Fund and a Woodlea Group Home Advisory Board scholarship.

At one point in my life, I felt I'd always just move from place to place, never sure of where I would end up or what I would do. I thought there was no end in sight. Thanks to Children's Aid and Family Services, I was able to turn my life around and accomplish more than I ever thought was possible.

Name has been changed to protect client privacy.

BE A VOLUNTEER, FOSTER/ADOPT A CHILD OR DONATE TODAY