



## Portland Teen Describes What Reclaiming Futures Meant to Her Life

At a Capitol Hill briefing in 2006, 19-year-old Tiffiney Hendon of Portland, Ore., described her journey from being a methamphetamine addict to now serving as a mentor to young women with similar struggles.

"Growing up there was a lot of neglect and abuse at home," Hendon told the audience of more than 120 congressional aides, federal officials and legislators. "When I was 15, I came to find out my parents were using meth. After that, it opened the door for me to run wild. How can you tell me not to do these things if you're doing them yourself? From there I quit going to school. I started using meth. Using meth helped me forget the problems I was having at home. Quickly meth became a way of life for me. I was using it every single day."

After getting pulled over by the police on her way to a meth lab, Hendon entered a treatment program. Shortly afterward, she left treatment but eventually returned and completed the program. While she was in treatment, a court counselor, who was part of the *Reclaiming Futures* project in Portland, came to see Hendon about a pending felony charge against her. The counselor offered Hendon the option to participate in a diversion program that, if completed, would result in the felony charges being dropped.

The choice of a diversion program "was an amazing thing," Hendon recalled. "I thought I had ruined [my life]. A felon at 17? How am I going to get financial aid? How am I going to get a job? What point is there in not using drugs?"

Through the diversion program, Hendon was also assigned a family advocate, who provided the additional stability that she craved.

"The family advocate was really there for me in treatment," she said. "[Before that] I had no one to talk to—no friends, no family. Not only did the court counselor and advocate talk to me about getting clean and not using drugs but asked me what I wanted to do for school and a job. They asked what I liked to do, what did I think is fun and whether I wanted to go to church. They didn't just say stop using drugs."

At the Capitol Hill briefing in 2006, Hendon said that she was completing a dual credit program where she was receiving high school and college credit. She was living in a foster home but seeing her mother—who had stopped using meth—on a regular basis.

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Hendon was also serving as a mentor to other young women struggling with substance abuse. She also pressed charges against someone who had sexually abused her and that person was sentenced to jail.

"In order to rebuild your entire life and things you've learned and accumulated over years, it takes a lot of time and work and support and encouragement," she said. "And that is something that *Reclaiming Futures* has helped me with. They have provided that to me in my time of need. They have really guided me and supported me and encouraged me. I had no family. For me *Reclaiming Futures* really was my family."