



*In anticipation of YCS' 100th anniversary in 2018, we are publishing a series of articles that feature former clients paths to fulfilling lives as adults. This is the 1st installment in the series.*

Medically Retired Army Sergeant Quincy Lopez has been fighting against the odds most of his life. Maybe that's why this wounded warrior has been able to achieve success where so many of his childhood peers have faltered. Today, the veteran of Operation Enduring Freedom and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF/OEF) is a mentor for the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) in Florida where he assists injured soldiers who are returning to civilian life. Lopez also travels around the country with a non-profit called Catch a Lift Fund, as a physical fitness trainer, helping those wounded get back into physical activity while pursuing a master's degree in social work. In the future, he plans to open a no-profit that helps veterans.



Lopez, now 35 years, says that he feels like he's lived several lives.



Quincy, 10, at Davis House

His first life: a troubled childhood. At the age of six, Lopez was admitted into a children's hospital for a psychological evaluation at the request of his mother. It was here that the doctors discovered that Lopez had been physically and psychologically traumatized by his parents. The Division of Youth and Family Services stepped in and placed him at a YCS therapeutic residence in Newark called Davis House. It was the first of many out of home placements for Lopez.

"I gave all the staff at Davis House a very hard time...I felt abandoned and the only thing I knew was anger," remembers Lopez." Despite Lopez's' efforts to alienate himself from the staff, he was treated with warmth and kindness. "They [the staff] realized all my behaviors were coming from my frustration, and they showed me compassion."

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Quincy and Mary Leacock

To this day, Lopez can still recall the names of many of the staff at the psychiatric children's home. This past December, he stopped by the Newark facility in hopes of seeing some of the staff and personally thanking them.

Mary Leacock, Davis House supervisor, was thrilled to see Lopez. She recalls his time at the home with nostalgia. "We could see Quincy's potential. He was intelligent, charming and always respectful to the staff and other children," says Leacock, explaining that his anger was directed at his situation - not the people around him. "Yes, he often tried to run away and trash his room when he was upset, but if you spoke to Quincy softly or gave him a hug, he'd respond in kind."

Once Lopez aged out of the system, he struck out on his own. He found a place to live with a friend, got a job and enrolled in community college.

Life #2:

At 20, Lopez moved from Newark to Florida to help his ailing grandmother. He joined the Army so he could declare her as a dependent and put her on his health insurance. She died soon after, but Lopez found the discipline of Army life suited him. He served tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Before his last deployment to Iraq in 2006, Lopez paid a visit to another site of positive childhood memories: the YCS May Academy. He attended the special education school while he was at Davis House. Principal, Clare Burke, immediately remembered Lopez. "He was this bubbly little boy...maybe a little too bubbly," laughed Burke. "Everyone liked him."

Lopez knew what Burke meant. "I had a lot of energy back then and the teachers knew how to keep me busy and out of trouble.

Life #3:

Six months' later fate stepped in and Lopez was seriously wounded by an IED in Iraq. He returned to the states and had several surgeries over the next 10 years to save his leg. During that time, he earned 2 bachelor's degrees, got married and had a son. He retired from the Army in 2009 and began working as a certified mentor for the Wounded Warrior Project in Florida.

He retired from the Army in 2009 and began working as a counselor for the Wounded Warrior Project in Florida. In 2016, Lopez underwent surgery for the partial amputation of his right leg. "It's OK, I'm fine," asserts Lopez. "I've defied all the odds and I'm doing great."

For Lopez's' courage on the frontlines, he received several medals including the Purple Heart, Combat Action Badge, and the Global War on Terrorism Medal.

When Lopez was a child at Davis House, a counselor told him that his life was not supposed to be the way it was. He told me, - "Your life should be better." Lopez took the belief his counselors had in him to heart and he says he is now he is committed to paying it forward any way he can.

Lopez declares, " Everything happens for a reason. The only limitations in life are the ones you accept and I am not in the accepting game; tell me what I cannot do and I will show you what I can do"!

