



Ginger

Lives: At GEMS safe house.
Likes: Music. Be with my little godsons.
Makes her cross: Lies and gossip.
Sad: When I feel lonely.
Wants to be: A midwife.
Looks up to: Rachel.

Finally home

“When I woke up for the first time in my room in the GEMS house, it felt different. ‘This can’t be true’, I was thinking, because I felt so safe.”

Ginger was born in Jamaica. “My mother died when I was three and my godmother took me in. I loved playing in the sun with all my friends. I thought I was gold.”

New life in the US

“I came to the US at 12 and was adopted by my aunt. It was exciting, but hard to leave everything I was used to.”

Ginger got good grades in school, but she was bullied.

“One girl cut my hair! But the worst thing was that my adoptive mom beat me. She used whatever she could lay her hands on, a shoe or a belt, and she used to say: ‘I’ll send you back to Jamaica’. I finally snapped and told a counselor. Everyone in the family got mad and stopped talking to me.”

Ginger lived with her friends and at a crisis shelter, but eventually tried to be reunited with her family.

“My adoptive mom didn’t want me there. She called the cops and said I was

suicidal, to come and get me. They took me to a hospital and put me in a box room for two weeks, even though I kept saying I definitely wanted to live. When I came out, my adoptive mom said she wouldn’t take me back. I felt broken.”

Accommodation for sex

Ginger put an ad out saying she needed somewhere to sleep, and it wasn’t long before she got a response.

“A 40-year-old man came and picked me up. He promised to fix somewhere for me to stay, food and clothes, and to help me go back into school. In exchange, he wanted sex. I felt like I had no choice. After a month, he wanted me to have sex with his friend. I couldn’t do it. One morning I got up really early and snuck out. He tried to find me, but I managed to get away. If I hadn’t gone to GEMS’ safe house, I don’t know where I’d be now.”



7:00 a.m. Good morning

“I wake up and go to sleep with my phone! I do everything on it: Talk to friends, read the news, watch movies, listen to music and play games.”



7:30 a.m. Breakfast together

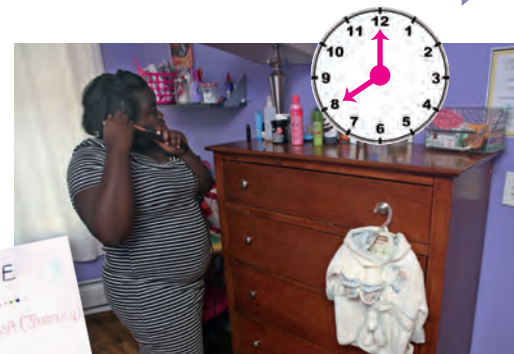
“We have a shared kitchen where we can make breakfast, eat and talk with our manager. It wasn’t like that in my adoptive family. They acted like I was invisible.”



8:00 a.m. Dreams for the future

“I love my room. I’ve put up pictures and a poster that I made at GEMS, about why I want to save money. Because I want:

- To visit my home in Jamaica.
- To get my own place.
- To open a day care, because I love kids.
- To open a hair salon.”





7:30 a.m.
Hair stylist
 "I'm good at hair styling and I often fix the other girls' hair, from plaits to curling and straightening hair."



8:45 a.m. Quick clean up
 "Everyone in the house helps take care of the cleaning. We have a schedule saying what we need to do every day!"

Ginger and her friends at GEMS style one another's hair!



"There's no sign on our building and we have to keep our address top secret. It's for everyone's safety, because what if the guy you were with decides to pop up and do something crazy."



9:00 a.m. Time to get out!
 "The only thing I don't like is that we always have to be out of the house by nine and we can't come back until early evening. But I keep busy! Studying, working and going to GEMS of course."





10:30 a.m. Full steam ahead at GEMS

"I love GEMS! I've made so many new friends here, we just get each other. During school I only come in the afternoon, but now it's the holidays and we're celebrating the annual 'Stop the child sex trade week'. We have workshops and fun activities every day. My favourite is a group where we talk about politics and current events."

"Rachel is someone you can count on. You can call her at any time. Last night she came to the safe house at midnight and stayed until morning, because one of the girls was going through a bad time. Rachel is like a best friend and she is very resourceful. And she's a great cook!"



8:00 p.m. Evening chat

"The safe house manager is always there to listen and support me if I feel sad or lonely!"



Need a safe home

New York is one of the most expensive cities in the world to live in. At least 70,000 homeless people live on the streets and in shelters. Some 30,000 of them are children. Most homeless people are with their families. Many of the parents have jobs, but they earn too little to afford the city's high rents.

Many girls are drawn into, or find it hard to leave the streets because they have nowhere to go. Girls over 16 can live in GEMS' safe house and get help to prepare themselves for an independent life. Younger girls often live in foster homes. Rachel and GEMS provide training for both the girls and the staff there, so that the staff understand what the girls have gone through and what they need and are entitled to in order to thrive.

10:00 p.m. Best blanket

"I loved the blanket I got the first time I came to the house. Then I ran away one time, but I came back after a while. They tried to give me a different blanket, but I wanted mine! It makes me feel safe."

