



CHIEFTAIN PHOTO/BRYAN KELSEN

Elysia Bassett, 17, smiles as she leaps into the air at her East Side home Thursday afternoon. The youngster was named the Boys and Girls Clubs of Pueblo County's Youth of the Year.

A place to call home

Boys and Girls Clubs became
a refuge for Youth of the Year

BY RYAN SEVERANCE
THE PUEBLO CHIEFTAIN

As she puts it, the Boys and Girls Clubs of Pueblo County gave Elysia Bassett a home.

Bassett, a 17-year-old Centennial High School senior, was named Youth of the Year Thursday night at the Boys and Girls Clubs of Pueblo County's annual dinner and awards banquet.

Bassett has been a member of the clubs for as long as one possibly can be from when she was 5 years old to graduating high school.

She was adopted by her aunt when she was 2 years

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old because her parents were unable to take care of her. Her two brothers also were adopted, but by different family members so they were all split up.

It really affected me, Bassett said. Not necessarily when I was little, but around third or fourth grade I started to see kids talk about their parents and all this stuff and how they look like their dad or mom and it was just hard.

She said the Boys and Girls Clubs helped her overcome those feelings and uplifted her.

I definitely think the club has helped me overcome this because they gave me a home when my home didn't really feel like a home, Bassett said. They gave me a place that I was safe to be able to go and talk to them and say, 'Hey I'm feeling this way' or 'Hey, this is how I really feel. Can we do something about it?' And they gave me a safe place to be able to express my feelings and be able to feel safe.

Bassett joined the club the first day she could when she turned 5 and has been a member ever since.

She started going to the club with relatives when she was 4 years old.

And it was the biggest deal for me wanting to go, she said. When I signed up, it was the best thing ever. It was really cool to have a place to go every day after school

that not only helped me with my homework, and not only made me feel safe, but also cared about my well-being. And they pushed me to succeed no matter what I wanted to do.

It's such an amazing place and it's so great to see how they changed, not only my life but so many others' kids' lives.

Melanie Bravo, the president and CEO of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Pueblo County, said Bassett exemplifies what a club kid is.

Elysia talks about her ups and downs, and the club was there the whole time, Bravo said.

What's great about Elysia is she's a strong leader, has overcome a lot of adversity and kind of ongoing adversity that we see our kids dealing with. She has gone through all those struggles and come out on the other side better for it.

Bassett has earned a full-ride scholarship to Colorado State University-Pueblo where she said she is planning on studying mass communications in hopes of becoming a radio or news reporter.

In addition to Bassett, more than 50 club members were honored for their achievements Thursday night at the banquet.

The Pueblo Housing Authority was honored as the club's 2017 Grand Champion of Youth for its commitment to Pueblo youth.

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