



TRANSFORMATION

AJ YOUNG FINDS HIS INNER BEAUTY

Through his college career, AJ Young, a doctoral student at Temple University, was uncomfortable in his own skin. He was unhappy with how people saw him and interacted with him.

Growing up in Elgin, Illinois, people didn't really recognize Young's identity the way that he wanted, he says, which had made him self-conscious.

"That's a big part of what led me to start learning about transgender and everything it encompasses," Young said. "Both positives and the negatives. It's a big change, and that decision couldn't possibly be made in a day."

When Young moved to Philadelphia a few years ago, he finally had room to breathe and research the matter with a clear head. In Philadelphia, no one had known him since childhood and he was given a clean slate.

Young made the decision to make the change in the summer of 2012. He adds that he had never been completely sure that the change was the right decision, but he knew that he had to try.

"I was never 110 percent sure, but I knew that if I didn't at least try it, I would spend the rest of my life wondering if it would have been right for me, and that's not a good feeling," Young says.

Young's family was supportive of his decision. He was not afraid to come to them, because he knew that he did not have to hide who he really was. The only person who was hesitant about the transformation was Young's mother, who was worried about how it would affect her child's health.

"I have four younger siblings, and all of them have been wonderful. My family has never wanted anything more than to see me happy and content with myself and my life," Young says.

Young is now active in LGBTQ matters on and off the university's campus. After he finishes his coursework and begins working on his dissertation, he plans to make efforts to create an LGBTQ center and multi-cultural student support program. He also plans to work with organizations that advocate social justice.

Many who are struggling with their sexuality see Young as a role model and inspiration. He offers advice and an ear to listen to anyone who asks for it.

"My sisters and their friends thought it was so cool, what I was doing," Young says. "Our younger generation are more open-minded, and they aren't opposed to LGBTQ. They made me into this hero for doing something they thought was so amazing."

HEND SALAH