



The Future of Foster Care

a **revolution**
for **CHANGE**

Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute's

2011 Foster Youth Internship Report

History

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute (CCAI) is a non-profit organization that works to raise awareness about the needs of children without families and to remove policy barriers that hinder children from knowing the love and support a family provides. CCAI is unique in that each of our programs brings together policymakers and individuals with direct foster care or adoption experience. We have found that when policymakers hear direct experiences of those affected by orphan and child welfare policy, they become engaged in this issue and work to bring about legislative improvements in an effort to ensure each child has their right to a family realized.

CCAI was founded in 2001 by advocates of the world's orphaned and foster youth. In founding CCAI, these advocates sought to match the commitment of members of Congress' Adoption Caucus, the Congressional Coalition on Adoption, with the information and resources needed to make the dream of a family a reality for every child.

Mission Statement

The Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute is a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to raising awareness about the millions of children around the world in need of permanent, safe, and loving homes and to eliminating the barriers that hinder these children from realizing their basic right of a family.

Foster Youth Internship Program

CCAI's Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program is a highly esteemed Congressional Internship for young adults who spent time in the foster care system. The FYI program began in 2003 as an effort to raise awareness to federal policymakers about the needs and unique perspectives of those who spent time in foster care. As part of the program, CCAI organizes retreats, advocacy trainings, and various networking opportunities with experts in the child welfare field. Throughout the summer, the FYI interns spend time researching about policy issues affecting foster children across the country. These experiences allow the interns to create a policy report that is presented at a Congressional briefing and released to child welfare advocates across the country.

As a result of the program, federal policymakers are shown firsthand the experiences of youth in foster care, and as a result go on to use their new knowledge to inspire legislative change. Interns participating in this program benefit both personally and professionally, gaining experience and skills that will bolster their careers for years to come and with a foundation to be lifelong advocates for improving the foster care system.

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FOREWORD

I learned that courage was not the absence of fear, but the triumph over it.
The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear.

– Nelson Mandela

On January 15, 2009, US Airways flight 1549 was three minutes into its journey from New York’s Laguardia Airport to Charlotte, North Carolina when the plane’s engine struck a bird, forcing the flight’s pilot, Chesley B. “Sully” Sullenberger, to make an emergency landing in the Hudson River. Due to his quick thinking and 42 years of aviation experience, all 155 passengers were able to return home to their families that night, having suffered nothing more than a chilly dip in the river. In the days, weeks and months that followed, Captain Sullenberger was honored again and again for his heroic actions that saved the lives of all on board his plane. Among his well wishers were two Presidents, both houses of Congress, every major news network in the world, and the half a million fans of his Facebook page. He and his crew were even given a standing ovation at that year’s Superbowl.

No doubt “Sully” is a hero. He stepped up in spite of overwhelming adversity and was willing to put his own life on the line in order to save the lives of his passengers and crew. As I sat watching the whole experience unfold, I could not help but think about the many heroes that I have had the privilege of meeting over my nearly ten year experience with the CCAI Foster Youth Internship (FYI) Program. Much like Captain Sully, the over 100 young leaders who have participated in this life-changing program are among life’s true heroes. No doubt, they are among mine. Time and time again they somehow have stayed on course, even when every odd seemed stacked against them. Their actions are not those of someone driven by personal ambition or self preservation, but by a sense of duty to make a difference for those who are following behind them. And perhaps what I find most inspiring is that they do this all with an amazing amount of humility and grace.

It is sometimes said that a true leader is not one who leads you down an already established road, but rather a person who has the courage and the vision to forge a new path. Each of the personal essays that follow in this report do exactly that—they challenge us to think about how federal policymakers can forge a new path for the over 400,000 children entrusted to our care. As the title of the report suggests, the path we are on must be a road to revolution. We can no longer sit idly in despair while tens of thousands of our nation’s future leaders are deprived of the things they need to achieve their God given potential.

To my dear friends, Keshia, Richard, Amy, Jessie, Mari, Derrick, MJ, Taati, Madison, Melanie, Ruth, Kadidjia, Mitsy, Linda and Desi, may you always have the courage to choose your own path and know that wherever you have the courage to lead, I will proudly follow.



Response to Legislation Proposed in the 112th Congress

Over the past nine weeks, the FYI interns have engaged in a series of discussions on how several areas of law now under consideration by Congress directly affect them and the 408,000 children presently in care. What follows are the responses to a short survey on three major pieces of foster care related legislation that are due to be re-authorized during this session of Congress: the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program; the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) and the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) Act. In addition, interns offered their perspectives on ways that the federal financing system could better promote important goals such as normalcy, permanency, accountability and stability.

SECTION 1

Promoting Safe and Stable Families Program (PSSF)

Section 2 (10-13) of the bill (P.L. 109-288, Child and Family Services Improvement Act of 2006) focuses on substance abuse as a cause for youth to be removed from their homes and enter foster care. Did parental substance abuse have an effect on you? Do you believe that this issue is still relevant in today's child welfare system? In what ways?

Of the thirteen FYIs that responded, seven reported that substance abuse was either a primary reason they entered care, or the reason they could not return home.

Of the six FYIs who were not personally affected by substance abuse, four maintained the issue is still relevant in today's child welfare system.

According to the FYIs that responded, substance abuse is still relevant in today's child welfare system because in addition to being a major factor for children entering into the child welfare system, substance abuse can lead to maltreatment, and can hinder physical and emotional stability, which can prevent parents from developing healthy relationships with their children.

- Substance abuse was the underlying reason why I came into to care, but there was a lot of abuse going on in my house. My father's use of drugs and alcohol was not a good combination for me. I personally believe that substance abuse is very relevant in today's child welfare system. I feel this way because we as a system are not dealing with the underlying problem that causes children to come into the system. Most children come into care because of mental health and substance abuse. In my opinion, if we find ways to address these two issues, we will lower the number of children in care.
- Both of my parents were drug and alcohol abusers. I was taken out of my home for this reason. I believe that substance abuse plays a key role in the removal of children from their family and parents. This is the biggest reason for children being removed, and I believe it will continue to be the number one reason as time goes on.
- Parental substance abuse did have an effect on me. My biological parents abused crack cocaine. As a result, seven out of my eight siblings (including myself) were removed from our biological parents' care. I believe that there are still a large number of kids who are either at risk of entering the child welfare system, or who have entered the child welfare system as a result of substance abuse. For example, the state of California is home to over 58,012 kids, making it the largest child welfare system in the country. Of these 58,012 kids, an estimated 80% of them have been removed from the care of their biological families due to some form of substance abuse. Moreover, substance abuse can and continues to lead to maltreatment in the forms of abuse and neglect.
- Substance abuse was not a factor in why I was removed from my home. However, I do believe substance abuse is a large proponent in the cause of removal of many youth from their biological homes to this day. Substance abuse hinders individuals from being healthy adults and being able to foster healthy relationships with their children.

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- Parental substance abuse did not have a significant effect on me, and was not the reason for me being placed in the foster care system. However, substance abuse is a vast motive of why children are being placed in the foster care system today. Many children are growing up in homes where parents have many issues with drugs, alcohol and other addictions that hinder the child's stability and well-being.
- Substance abuse did affect me. While I was growing up I felt like my mother was putting drugs and alcohol before me. When I needed her to help me with school and emotional problems she was not there because of her addiction. In response, I decided to go look for love elsewhere, and that search still affects me today.
- Substance abuse had an effect on me. I was taken from my parents at the age of three. I was removed from my home along with my two siblings. I physically opened the door to the case worker who came and took us because of my parents' drug use and neglect. Substance abuse tore my family apart. Substance abuse is still relevant today, and it is one of the major reasons why children end up in foster care. With substance abuse, particularly methamphetamines, parents end up in prison, which is even harder on the family because it splits them up even more.
- Parental substance abuse did not personally affect me. However, I do believe that it is a great issue that is relevant in today's child welfare system. A high percentage of children who are removed from their homes are removed because someone in the family or a parent is a substance abuser.
- I do believe that parental substance abuse remains a relevant issue in the child welfare system today. Although parental substance abuse was not the reason my siblings and I had entered foster care, it became the reason why we could not return home. Before my placement in the "system," my mother did not show any signs of substance abuse. She smoked occasionally and she drank socially. As a single mother, I feel that she did her best to provide us with everything we needed. When we were taken out of her care, her dependence on alcohol increased and her exploration of drugs began. My mother began to deteriorate; she lost her home, began dating abusive men, and found herself homeless within three years time. I feel that my siblings and I had survived the system, but that the system had broken my mother. I feel that the system had essentially stripped away the support my mother needed. She often expressed to me that she had felt alone and defeated in the process to get her children back. Until this day, I believe my mother had turned to damaging substance abuse because she did not know how to cope with her loss and depression. I am aware that many children enter the system due to parental substance abuse. I only wish my mother had the support she needed to keep her from turning to drugs and alcohol as a means of coping with the loss of everything so valuable to her.
- I believe that this issue is very relevant in today's child welfare system. Something I would like learn more about is the mandatory drug testing that many states are requiring to receive TANF funds. If the parent tests positive for drugs and lose their TANF funds, what steps does the child welfare system take to protect the children?

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- Although substance abuse was not the reason I was removed from my home, I believe it is still very much relevant in the child welfare system. Research shows that substance abuse, including prescription drugs, is on the rise in the U.S. Children of addicts are twice as likely to become addicts themselves. Children with at least one addicted parent lack family cohesion, often suffer abuse and neglect, physical and emotional instability, and oftentimes are removed from their homes.

The bill calls for funding provided to states to be spent in four service areas: 1) family preservation 2) family support 3) time-limited family reunification and 4) adoption promotion and support. Do you feel these four areas cover the services needed for families? Were these services available to you and your family? If so, were they effective?

Of the thirteen FYIs that responded, ten reported that the four areas cover the basic services needed for families, especially the area of family support. However, these FYIs also stressed that the four service areas are not implemented in an effective manner. For instance, five FYIs reported that these services were unavailable to their families; two FYIs reported that their families were unaware of the availability of these services; and four FYIs reported that although at least one of the services was made available to their families, the services were ineffective.

Of the thirteen FYIs that responded, one maintained that the four areas alone do not adequately cover the services needed for families.

- I feel these four areas are very important, and if implemented properly, can truly have a great outcome on children and families working with the system. Children want to be with their parents regardless of how much the child welfare system does not believe they want to be there. The system did its best to keep my family together by putting services in place, but my parents had to do their part. My mom was willing to work toward this, but my father was not. I did not want to return home because I knew that my dad did not change. I believe when a parent wants their child back and we put the services and support in place for them, parents will take advantage of it. I support these services as long as we are not punishing the child by holding up the process of them having a permanent family because we are giving a parent time when that parent is not trying.
- Family preservation is a good start. I think this is very crucial because it is so important in preventing children from entering the foster care system and helping at-risk families to avoid problems that could have been prevented. I never received these services. If my parents would have received help for drug and alcohol and abuse, being in foster care could have been avoided. Time-limited family reunification is a good part of this law. It is important that social workers do not just bounce children from home to home and keep them in within the system. There should be a time limit to how long it can take for permanency - whether through reunification or adoption. Adoption promotion and support is probably the best service on this list. The only thing that I can say is that I wish it was not only for adoption, because foster care promotion should be included in this!

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- I do believe that these four areas cover the services needed for families. Unfortunately, these services were not available to me. Although I was initially released home a year after I was placed into care, my reunification did not last because of the lack of services geared towards improving my family situation.
- I do not think that these areas cover the services needed for families, and I assume that these services were not available to my family. Families should also be given post-placement services to aid in successful reunification. Also, post-permanency services should be extended to families to ensure that reunification is healthy and safe for the child.
- I am not sure that family preservation or family support services were adequately provided to my biological family. I generally feel that child welfare agencies are quicker to remove children from their biological homes than to actually try and help support or teach the biological parents how to be better parents.
- These are four extremely important areas, and government funding for these four services provides vital services that are needed for both biological and foster families to maintain a safe and stable environment. These services also keep biological families connected and provide them with a chance to reunite.
- I believe that these areas service the needs of a family because to avoid foster care, a family needs help the moment problems begin. What I like most about this bill is that there is no income requirement to use the services. Although these services were available, my family did not use them.
- These four areas do cover the services needed by families. The problem is that programs developed to hit these targeted areas are not effective and do not actually support what they promote. These services were available to my family, but we were not aware of the service areas and were kept in the dark about essential services such as family support. My family was in a sense victimized by not being given the option of having these services.
- There were a few services available to my mother, but not many. She needed a social worker to help her to figure out what she needed to do to get us back, and she needed services to help her maintain a stable and sober life. My father was offered nothing at all. Those four categories never really happened for me.
- I believe that the four areas mostly cover the services needed by families.

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- I believe this bill does a nice job of covering the areas necessary to deal with children in care. I think the most important aspect of this bill is family support. It is important for both the children and parents going through this process to have a support system that will root them on until the end. I do not feel that anyone in my family had the support they needed. At the end of our long journey through the foster care system, my siblings found a support system through their adopted families, and I found my support system through my peers. I do not think there was an active search to get my siblings and me out of long-term foster care. We just got lucky. My mother lacked that inner strength to be her own support system. Looking back now, I wish she had the support that would have empowered her to get her children back.
- I do not think any of these services were provided to me or my family. It seemed like the goal for me was always long term foster care, and that is where I stayed until I aged out. It looks like three out of the four areas involve the goal of family reunification or preservation. However, from my perspective, I think that most of the focus actually tends to be on finding adoptive parents or guardianship.
- These four services are a good start. However, my family was never informed of any of them. services. We were granted minimal sibling and parental visits. My parents were never offered preventative or support services.

Tell me about your experience with caseworker visits. Would increased visits from your caseworker have benefitted you and in what way? In addition to frequency, what other ways could these visits have been improved?

Of the 13 youth that responded to this question, seven expressed concerns about meeting with social workers in front of biological parents, grandparents and foster parents, and concerns about being unable to share concerns in front of others; several reported having good interactions with one or two of their caseworkers; and many felt that their interactions with their caseworkers were awkward or made them feel uneasy.

- I had a good caseworker after my final placement in care. She really cared about me and wanted to see me be successful. The worker before her was ok, but knowing what I know now he really didn't do his job. The night I was removed for good could have been avoided if the time he came out to visit had been different since my father was home and was not supposed to be in the house. That caseworker also used to interview in front of my mother so I couldn't tell him what was really going on. So it was good for him to visit but not good because I couldn't really talk to him. One thing I advocate for is giving the child the chance to talk to you as a caseworker one on one and not in front of others. Also, it is important to take what the child says seriously - just because it is a foster home does not mean it is safe. Listen to the child and what the child has to say.

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- My experiences with case workers were very minimal. When I was a child I remember going about once a year to “pretend like I lived with my biological mother” for the 20 minutes that my caseworker would come in the house and inspect. She would ask my mother a few questions and that was it for a year until the next time came around when we repeated the same thing. I do not remember being asked how I felt and if I was it was very brief and it was in front of my mother so I felt threatened and felt like I could not say anything. As I got older and was replaced into the foster care system at age fifteen, my social worker (a new one every time I had a caseworker meeting scheduled) would do exactly the same thing - come in the house, inspect, ask me a few questions in front of my foster parents, and then talked to them by themselves as I listened from my room to them saying how bad of a kid I was but how they were great parents who struggled with me but were doing a great job and handling me. This lasted about thirty minutes and then the caseworker left. Always, every time, there was a new social worker who came. I think that increased visits (every 3 months) would be better for foster youth in general. I also would like to see social workers show more care when visiting, have more training so they can catch when something is not right and be able to talk to a youth and tell when they are uneasy about something, and have time to talk to the youth by themselves to ask about foster parents treatment to them, and really have this taken into consideration.
- I believe that frequent caseworker visits may be necessary for younger children who are in need of constant supervision and guidance. In my case, visits from my case worker were not beneficial to me; in fact I found them pretty annoying. I believe that visits from caseworkers are only beneficial when a relationship is built between the caseworker and child and a common goal is being worked on. Visits could have been improved if they didn't feel like interrogation sessions and were more of a time to help the children grow.
- My caseworker visited my family periodically. Based upon my own personal experience I think her visitation was adequate. If I could relive it again, I would have just wanted someone to explain to me why she was there and why she had to come visit my family. Now that I am older I understand. However as a child I had no idea why this “visitor” would come to our home. Also, for the most part our conversations (the children) with our caseworker were brief. My mom typically did most of the talking. While it worked out in my experience, I think that this would have been dangerous if I was living in a home that was abusive or not safe. I would never have had the opportunity to convey this to the caseworker. I did not have her number and as a child I had no clue about how to get in contact with her. Based upon the experiences of my friends, caseworkers need to be more consistent with visitation (assuming that they visit at all). Sometimes horrible things happen to kids in the foster care system. When caseworkers don't visit or do not visit frequently enough, the state is failing in its responsibility to ensure the safety of children they vowed to protect. Moreover, in reality a caseworker not visiting a child can be seen as a form of neglect. Once a child is placed in the state's care and becomes a ward of the court, they become the responsibility of the state. In essence and reality the state assumes the role of “parent”. Thus it is hypocritical for the state to take a child away from their biological parent(s) and then “neglect” the child themselves by not visiting the child and ensuring that they are safe.

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- I greatly despised my monthly “face to face” visits with my caseworker. I feel the caseworker visits in my specific case were ineffective and a waste of time. I was very involved in school and extracurricular activities and many of my twenty three caseworkers did not care if I had a prior meeting or event for school when they asked to see me. And what infuriated me the most was the way the monthly “face to face” visits were delivered: the caseworker spent less than twenty minutes asking me questions - the same questions each month - and then would leave.
- Many of my caseworkers visited very frequently, I would say once or twice a month. We would sit down with the foster parents of the home I was residing in at the time. These visits were rather short, full of awkward moments, and not much dialogue. I wasn’t able to explain everything I wanted to, whether those reasons were because of intimidation, fear or shyness. Whatever it may have been I wasn’t able to express my true feelings. I have a couple of suggestions on improving the case workers visit with foster children. First, train caseworkers to be more interactive and motivated to visit with their children. Second, give the child a change of scenery, which means take the child out of the environment that they may be uncomfortable in. This gives the child a chance to free his mind for a moment, then sit them down and have a conversation. Because children are often shy, scared and paranoid when they have adults sitting over their shoulder listening, especially if they fear that adult.
- While in foster care I had two caseworkers. The first caseworker came over a lot to discuss things with my grandmother and my older sister. The only thing I remember with that caseworker is that she was coming over to give my grandmother papers to sign. I was about fourteen years old when we got the second caseworker, he use to come to the house about twice a month to discuss school and important issues with my grandmother. When I became a junior in high school the caseworker started coming to the school to check on me. If the caseworker would have visited more frequently I honestly don’t think it would have been any different because most of the meetings were filling out papers and for the most part I didn’t even know why I was filling out so many papers. There are so many things that could be improved with the visit. First, the caseworkers should not only explain papers to the parent but also to the child. Second, the caseworkers should talk equally to all children in the system under the household. Third, the caseworkers should understand every child’s individual needs and try to help. Fourth, the caseworkers should discuss every service that is offered to the child in the state directly with the child.
- Visits with my caseworker were extremely tense. My caseworker was not a very patient person or very forthcoming. Instead of helping out the family as a whole I was the only target. My entire family, who were secondary victims, was seen as the enemy as well. Increased visits would not have helped because I believe it would have confused me even further. These visits could have been improved if the caseworker had more training to effectively help the family as a whole.

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- No, I actually didn't like my caseworkers in the beginning. To me the visits were fake and the caseworkers didn't really care about me - it was just something they had to do. I think if there were caseworker visits that were done with the child alone, away from the foster parent, it could help.
- My caseworker visited me once a month. I had three caseworkers the entire time I was in care. I believe that a lot of the time social workers spend is spent apart from the child and they need to put an emphasis on getting to know the child.
- I often felt that the caseworker visit was a joke. When I was on an ICPC case in Nevada, I had a caseworker that visited me at school. She saw me for less than thirty seconds only to tell me that she just wanted to check if I was alive and in school. My original caseworker took the time to visit me and talk to me longer than the one in Nevada; however, I never felt that she took my concerns seriously or wanted to take action when I felt that there was an injustice in the home. Now that I am out of care and can visit my former foster parents, I found out that my caseworker had painted me as a terrible, emotionally-disturbed, violent child. Frequency in visits may help certain cases but I don't think that would solve the root of the problem. I understand that often times these social workers become burdened by case-loads and are more likely to be burnt out after a few years of work. We may be able to recruit quality social workers by giving them incentives to enter this line of work. Perhaps loan forgiveness would help.
- For most of the time I was in foster care, my case was through an agency, so I actually had two caseworkers who looked over my case. I had the same agency caseworker from the time I entered the agency's care until I aged out. She visited and called frequently, at least two times a month. However, my state caseworkers were very hard to get a hold of and rarely seen. The state caseworkers were also the only ones who had final authority in matters involving my case, so at times when they could not be reached it was very difficult on me.
- Our caseworker rarely, if ever, visited. Yes, I think increased visits from social workers would have benefitted my siblings and me. Increased visits from social workers would provide the social workers with a better sense of what is best for the child. Social workers are ultimately the ones who make life choices for foster children. It is imperative that they have the best understanding of the needs of the children. I think social workers should have to sign confidentiality agreements with the children so the children will feel safe sharing information with their socialworker.

Formula grants to courts help improve child welfare case handling, did you feel the effects of these laws. If not, how would you like to see them improved?

Of the three youth who responded to this question, none identified that they felt the effects of federal formula grants to courts for improved handling of child welfare cases.

- I do not feel I can answer this personally, but I would like to see children involved in the court process and have a voice in the court room. I feel far too many times children don't have a voice and we forget that we are in dependency court for the children.

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- In my personal experience I did not feel the effects of these laws. In addition, I feel the courts aren't always aware of some of the negligence that is transpiring in some of these foster homes. I know it's up to the caseworker and agencies to trace and relay this information to the courts; however that does not always happen. So even though there is a formula grant for the courts to improve case handling, it is ultimately up to the foster care agencies to do a better job to accurately communicate this information back to the courts. This ultimately gives the courts a better understanding of the case, and they can improve case handling accordingly.
- No. My family's case was never handled well in court, so I didn't feel the effects of this program. I don't know enough about formula grants to know how to improve them.

Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

Title 1 of the ESEA calls for a large portion of the funding provided to schools to be designated for purposes that serve the needs of disadvantaged youth. Did you feel that your school(s) as a whole understood foster youth as a category of disadvantaged youth? Did they use funding to help address your specific educational needs?

Of the 12 FYI that responded, four said that their school understood that foster youth were a category among disadvantaged youth and received services; seven said that their school did not, and one said this did not apply to them because they attended a private school.

- No, I do not feel that my schools understood foster youth as a category of disadvantaged youth. I feel that this lack of understanding is part of the reason for lower graduation rates. When you have been moved to 3 or 4 different schools and your records are getting lost, this makes no sense and feels like the child is being punished through no fault of their own. Also, because children in foster care don't have an educational advocate or someone who truly works with them and the school system to make sure they are in the right classes, foster children tend to be put in special education classes and have labels put on them they don't deserve. So it is a disconnect between the school system and child welfare system.
- I cannot answer this because I went to a private school.
- No, my school did not understand much of what being in foster care meant. I never felt as though I was any different than anyone else.
- I definitely think that my schools understood foster youth as a category of disadvantaged youth. Although I was not aware of any other youth, outside of my siblings, who were in foster care at my school I felt as though there was pre-judgment about our capabilities. For example, all of my siblings and I were all recommended for special education. I am not sure what the basis for the recommendation was.
- I'm not sure if they wholly understood my situation but I did not feel alienated while in school. My goal was to fully acclimate into the mainstream, and overall, I think I was able to reach that goal.
- ESEA funding is money needed to help disadvantaged children succeed in school. Sadly, I must say elementary and secondary schools do not see foster children as a disadvantaged youth. More significantly they might be unaware of who is a foster youth or not, are unable to provide extra benefits and academic assistance, tutors, etc, to aid disadvantaged foster children. There are some cases that foster youth do not need special assistance; however those cases are extremely rare, because in many cases disadvantaged foster youth do need special assistance.

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- I don't think my school understood foster youth as a category of disadvantage because I went to inner-city public school so they thought everyone was disadvantaged in a way because of lower funding.
- My school did not understand foster youth as a category of disadvantaged youth. The only funding that I received was for being economically disadvantaged and that came from my participation in the Educational Opportunity Fund (EOF) program.
- My school never once reached out to me, I feel like there were never any services offered to me when I was in high school. There was not one person who reached out to me because that may have made a dramatic difference in my life. I feel like the school did not make an effort to understand disadvantaged youth.
- In my particular case, I had never felt that I was a disadvantaged youth academically. Although I had some academic instability due to my constant change in placement, I always felt that my academics were in my own hands.
- Yes, very much so. I believe my schools were very helpful. I got school lunches paid for, they paid for my ACT, etc.
- No and no. Other than free lunches my schools never touched on foster youth in any capacity. I was fortunate enough to have one school counselor who helped me with emotional issues but no funds were ever used to assist me with anything else. I had no help with college research, aging out of care, career support or independent living.

The ESEA attempts to improve educational outcomes of transitional or homeless youth by requiring coordination at the state and local level between the McKinney-Vento Education of Homeless Children and Youth program and departments of education to address the educational needs of homeless youth. Suggestions have been made to incorporate foster youth in this section of the bill. Do you believe the needs of foster youth are the same as homeless youth? Explain.

Of the 9 FYI who responded, four said yes they believed foster and homeless had the same needs, three said no and two said yes and no.

- I think whatever it takes to get people to pay attention to kids in foster care should be tried. Kids don't care if they are put in the bill with homeless youth they just want to be given a chance. Research shows that when we put services in places children have a higher graduation rate, because someone is paying attention and investing in them like they are a normal child.

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- I believe the needs of foster care youth to be equal or greater than that of homeless children. Children entering the foster care system deal with the burden of being removed from their families. In addition, they are juggled through the foster care system. Because of this, education becomes the least important aspect of their lives as they fight the feelings hopelessness, grief and worthlessness. Reconstructing the mental wellbeing of children in foster care before the go remarkably astray is essential. Because if the focus is to make a difference early on, a lot of negativity can be eliminated before a youth embarks on a negative path.
- I believe incorporating youth in foster care into the McKinney-Vento Education of Homeless Children and Youth program would be beneficial for many youth in care because many experience “couch surfing” at their friend’s or acquaintance’s residence and many run away youth experience one or more nights spent on the street.
- No, I do not believe foster children should be incorporated into this section of the bill. My reasoning for that is, being a foster youth and being homeless, are two different categories. I understand many foster children end up homeless, and I hate seeing that transpire, but to me that means the state and foster care agencies didn’t do their job.
- No, I think the need for foster and homeless youth are very different. Foster youth have a place to live. While it may not be the best place, they have a roof over their head. Foster youth have many programs and people to help them before going homeless. I believe that homeless youth/people have made bad choices when they decide to go homeless. Foster youth go through things at home and it is the courts who decide that they must go into foster care.
- I believe that they are the same because in a sense they both have been abandoned and separated from their family. They need the same basics such as education, a home, training, and health care services.
- I think the improvement of educational outcomes for all children should be a priority at the state and federal level. In regards to whether foster youth and homeless youth have the same needs, I believe they definitely have common need for educational stability and academic support. Often times their personal challenges are beyond their control.
- Somewhat yes and somewhat no. I have worked with homeless youth populations and have seen that they are much more disadvantaged than most foster youth.
- Yes and no. Their emotional needs may be similar but foster youth have a roof over their head, food, and clothing along with other basic necessities. Homeless youth have no guardian, no one to have their best interest in mind, often have no shelter, food, access to education, etc.

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On both the state and local level, how would better coordination between the child welfare department and department of education have benefitted you?

Of the nine FYI who responded, one replied that nothing could have been improved, one said increase efforts to stay in same school, and one said maintain record, one said provide better guidance, and five said it would have improved their educational success and/or services.

- I honestly was blessed because I stayed at my same school and my foster parents were very involved with my schooling. I feel that each region should have a guidance counselor or two that work totally on issues with foster care youth. I very much like the program in Hillsborough county that has one guidance counselor that works with all 185 children in foster care in high school and middle school.
- Permanency should be the focus. I believe that children's services should make it a priority to make great matches for children and families and only if the children have to be removed. Whenever possible they should have the benefit of staying in the same school to as a result promote permanency in their lives.
- The child welfare department and the department of education in my state could have done a better job of making sure that my records transferred to each school that I attended. They could have also done a better job of holding me accountable for learning in the classroom. Once my teachers basically told me or demonstrated to me that they did not have high expectations of me so I literally gave up trying. They could have done a better job of making sure that my little brothers were in the least restrictive environment possible even though they were also diagnosed as "special education". They were isolated from the other students at school and were not put on an educational track that would grant them access to the California State University system or the University of California System. Other students in special education, who were not in foster care, were put on educational tracks that allowed them to attend one or both of these post secondary educational options. It should be mandatory for a caseworker, social worker or someone involved with the child welfare system to be involved with a child's education plan. They should have a meeting with the child's school counselor/academic planner to plan out the child's academic path that meets the needs of the child as well as gives them the opportunity to be eligible for admission for schools in each child's respective state. Students should not be discouraged from taking classes if they verbalize that they want to take specific courses. If a child's school does not have an academic counselor then the school should appoint an individual at the school to help in conjunction with a child welfare worker to plan out the student's academic plan. My personal experience was that I would meet with my school counselor and then I would meet separately with my caseworker to tell her what my counselor and I had decided. However, my caseworker/social worker was not involved in the planning of my educational endeavors.

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- Yes, I absolutely believe better coordination between the Child Welfare Dept. and Dept. of Education would have benefitted me and I believe this relationship would mean better outcomes for all youth in care. In my situation, I was hindered from excelling academically. I was prohibited from enrolling in the International Baccalaureate (IB) program because the program was only at one school in my district. For me to attend this school I would have had to transfer buses in the morning and afternoon and my foster parent and caseworker found it to be too dangerous and therefore a liability issue.
- I believe that I would benefit a lot because my school would understand what I go through at home that may cause me to miss school or not pay attention in class. Growing up we sometimes focus more on family problems than the importance of a good education.
- I think they would have a better understanding of my educational financial needs and realize that a tuition waiver would greatly help me and other foster youth in New Jersey.
- I think the first step for the two departments is to establish a partnership. A partnership in which they are working together to promote the educational stability of the child and doing things as partners such as transferring documents in a timely manner, making every effort possible to retain the student at their home school and by having an educational liaison for the child of some sort to help with the transition.
- I would have liked for teachers and school employees to have received some training, in order to have more knowledge about the foster care system and what it is like to have to bounce around place to place.
- I may have had more guidance when applying for college and student loans. I currently have \$30,000 worth of student loan debt that could have been avoided had I known how or where to go for help.

What impact do you believe charter schools can have on the educational needs of children in foster care?

Of the 8 FYIs that responded, six said charter schools can have an impact, one said they would not, and one said it depended on situation.

- The only major impact I see charter schools having on inner city public schools for foster youth, is that charter schools present a healthier, better environment that would help foster children excel and succeed. Foster youth could benefit from the assistance charter schools provide, such as healthier classroom environments, and academic assistance.
- I feel that charter schools could work as long as we can make it as normal as possible and not make a young person feel like something is wrong with them and so they have to go to this school. I feel that if a school can offer the services a young person needs in care then I am a fan of it.

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- I believe that charter schools will have a wonderful impact on the educational needs of children in the foster care system. CS will be ideal as it will foster special attention to the needs of foster children. Children will profit from the different academic techniques used and staff who are knowledgeable of needs of children in care.
- I feel there is a lot of potential in Charter schools that have not been explored yet. One of the unexplored potentials would be for youth in foster care. The unique environment charter schools are able to provide could definitely be beneficial to the foster care system.
- Charter schools can have a strong impact on children in foster care because charter school's main focus is on the student achievement. Most foster care children need special attention and charter schools can give it to them.
- I believe it would have a positive impact because charter schools have certain educational standards and have an accountability to maintain certain results. Giving a child a structured system is better than no system at all.
- I went to a public charter school when I was in the 7th grade. From my experience, I don't think it was any different from a public school and I never thought my quality of education was any higher than a public school.
- I really think it depends on the situation. The best possible solution is one that will allow for the most normal experience and one that does not single the foster child out or segregate them.
- Charter schools have more invested in their students. Principals and teachers are held accountable for their success. Charters/contracts have to be renewed with their sponsors, accountability in exchange for more autonomy. Charter schools encourage more community and parent involvement than public school systems. I am a huge supporter of charter schools.

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Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF)

What do you think about the four goals of the TANF program, which are: 1) assisting needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes 2) reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work and marriage 3) preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies and 4) encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families? If achieved do you think this would result in stronger and more self-sufficient families? Are there other goals the federal government could set?

Of the ten youth that responded to this question, one was undecided as to a response to TANF's goals, three felt the goals of the program were very important and being successfully met by the program, and six felt the goal were good goals but suggested possible improvements to the goals, and of these six, three agreed that accountability for benefits received was an important component for the program.

- I think that the four goals of TANF are a great idea but I feel that if we do not address substance abuse and mental health issues then children will continue to come into foster care. We have to do a better job of connecting people to resources within their communities to help with the issues they face. Tough job markets, lack of education, stress, the list goes on of factors that are not addressed by the goals of TANF. So while TANF may accomplish some of its stated goals, it needs to address substance abuse and mental health.
- I would like to know more about how this bill is assisting needy families so that children can be cared for in their own homes. Reducing the dependency of needy parents by promoting job preparation, work, and marriage is great. This law was passed in 1996 but is even more relevant in 2011 because of the number of people that are out of jobs. When people are out of their jobs they cannot support their families and have to resort to federal and state funds like food stamps, welfare, and social security. If we spend a little bit of money on these programs to help parents get jobs and get back to work, both the government and the families will benefit more. How is this law preventing out-of-wedlock pregnancies? Is it through education? Birth control? Abortion? How is this law encouraging the formation and maintenance of two-parent families? If this law and these four elements are achieved, I think that it will improve the United States a lot. It would result in stronger and more self-sufficient families. When families cannot support themselves they turn to drugs or selling drugs, abuse because of stress, living off the government, all of which result in children entering foster care.
- I believe helping everyone acquire education can solve a lot of disparities. How can a parent direct their child in the right direction if they themselves are not aware of what being productive truly means? Parenting classes should be offered. I also believe that reducing negative media images is crucial. Unfortunately, many underprivileged children live media-based lives.
- I am undecided about the four goals of TANF. Theoretically these goals sound adequate. The loose implementation of these goals produced weak outcomes for families receiving assistance. I believe there is a disconnect between the goals and outcomes.

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- The TANF program is extremely important, and what is even more considerable are the goals that it sets out to be accomplished. These four main goals are tremendously monumental because they help build the moral structure of families. By providing assistance in these areas, the program is strengthening the core structure of the family, and to me that's the ideal goal we want to build on.
- I believe this is a great program for families. The problem is that TANF programs may not hire caring staff or may hire people that just want to make a few dollars. The thing the government needs to make programs effective is caring staff. Yes, I believe that if TANF's goals are achieved this would be a wonderful program and would result in healthy, stronger, and self-sufficient families and would probably decrease children going into foster care.
- If these four goals were achieved I believe that the result would be stronger and more self-sufficient families. But I believe that the federal government needs to specify the services geared towards the mental health of families as an essential goal of the TANF program.
- From what I read on the goals of TANF, I feel it does a good job of preventing dependency on the welfare system. I definitely think that this program pushes families towards self-sufficiency.
- I very much believed that if these goals were achieved, families could be more self sufficient. However, it is accountability that makes the difference. What methods does this program use to ensure that the families that receive TANF are actually out looking for jobs? For example, are they given a mentor? And, for a single parent, how do they encourage marriage?
- Yes, as long as accountability is better monitored. The federal government could also include promoting social and community involvement. Also, it should be mandatory for anyone relying on government assistance to be subject to drug testing.

Do you believe that this program is working, considering the number of youth that still continue to enter the system due to abuse and neglect? How can TANF and PSSF be better connected?

Of the eight youth that responded to this question, four did not believe that TANF was working properly, three thought it could possibly work well and provided suggestions as to how this might best be implemented or improved, and one answer was not applicable.

- This program is not working to its best abilities.
- I don't believe the TANF program is working effectively. I also don't believe that the types of jobs being offered are ideal. The importance of education needs to be stressed through these national programs. Through education, poverty and lack of resources should no longer be excuses for underprivileged groups.

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- It's sad to say, but no I don't think these programs work, and if they are it is not very noticeable. What is noticeable is the neglect and abuse that still occurs in homes across the country today. This abuse is taking place because people are not being taught the correct way to build family morals, and few parents and children are properly assisted in achieving these four main goals in building family relationships. The program needs to better train parents as to how to provide a stable environment for their children, and explain to them psychological effects a non-stable environment has on children.
- I think the program can and will work but it is going to take some time for families to realize and understand that there is help out there and people do care. I don't think these TANF and PSSF should be connected because they have two different needs and purposes.
- I do not believe this program is working. When my family received help from TANF all we received was food assistance and rare checkups for the young children in the family. TANF and PSSF can be better connected by having an accountability system related to each other.
- If a parent wishes to receive TANF funds I think they should be given mandatory drug screenings. However, if they test positive for drugs, the solution is not to just cut them off from TANF funds, but put them on a sort of probation and offer them rehabilitation services, while at the same time making sure the children are in a safe environment.
- Possibly. AFCARS data does show a decreasing trend in the number of children entering foster care; however, the rates of children aging out in recent years is on the rise. These statistics lead me to believe that these programs still have a way to go. In my opinion it all boils down to education!

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Child Welfare Financing

In what ways could federal funding be used to promote:

A. Normalcy?

- Normalcy could be promoted by allowing kids to participating in extracurricular activities such as sports, dance, and theater. We should allow states to set funds aside so that young people can participate in these things. We also need to do a better job of holding states accountable for ensuring that kids in care participate in normal activities.
- Federal funding can be used to promote normalcy by ensuring that proper measures are taken to prevent multiple care placements. If placement is ideal, funding should be used to make sure that staff members and prospective parents stay properly trained. These actions will mean that children in the foster care system move less and allow for lasting relationships to be built.
- Federal dollars can be used to promote normalcy by providing more training to individuals who want to become foster parents. Training should be focused on teaching foster parents how to treat their foster children as they would any other normal child. They should be trained to treat them as though they were their own kids.
- The main objective for the government and foster care agencies is to provide every foster child with the ability to live a normal life. Every child wants to live a normal life. The only way a foster child is going to experience this type of life is by government promoting this principle through its funding. Government funding allows foster families to be better equipped and have the money they need to cover expenses, whether those expenses are basic necessities, such as hygiene products, clothes, shoes, and special features, such as sporting activities, and trips. And the only way more kids will get to live a better life, is to make individuals more aware of this factor, so we can use government funds to also promote awareness of how many kids do not live a normal life. If people knew more about it, then maybe they would actually start doing something about it.
- Promote extracurricular activities, in and out of school, provide educational programs and support for college tuition, independent living, family development, and put a limit on the amount of foster children in homes. Growing up with 11 other foster children in one home is not normal.

B. Permanency?

- I think we do a good job right now with permanency; we are getting children out of foster care and are getting them permanent families. I think we should do a better job of looking at children relatives as permanency options and help out those who are taking children in and raising them as their own.

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- More federal dollars should be allocated toward pre and post permanency services. Currently most federal dollars are spent on foster care which is the least desirable outcome for children in the child welfare system. If federal dollars were invested up front then less children would be entering care which may help reduce the number of foster youth who end up in foster care, prison, and on welfare. All of these outcomes cost the states and the federal government a lot more money than pre and post permanency services. Also more federal dollars should be allocated towards reunifying families rather than putting kids in the foster care system.
- Permanency is a huge issue that is being debated in foster care around the country. Many foster care agencies cannot find permanent homes for thousands of foster youths around the country. Government funding must be put towards promoting this issue because it's about time we start finding foster children permanent homes, it's the only chance they have of living a normal life. If we start increasing awareness of this issue, and start promoting the subject of finding adequate foster homes, we should be able to find a solution to this massive problem.
- By focusing on family reunification and/or adoption, NOT long term foster care. This can also be done by having more court hearings and a shorter amount of time in between them.
- More kinship placements, more thorough background checks on foster parents, longer homestudy process, and more and better education for social workers

C. Accountability?

- I feel that when states don't do a good job we should hold them accountable. I think we could create a grant program for states who have higher graduation rates for kids in foster care and reward them. I like the program "race to the top" and feel we can do that for kids in foster care with the child welfare agencies.
- States should not be granted federal funds if improvement is not occurring. Education needs to become our number one priority, parental training and human bonding effective methods need to be put in place.
- Every year federal dollars are wasted on the child welfare system because there is little to no accountability. Funding can be used to promote accountability by punishing states that are not making improvements in their foster care system. States who are doing a great job should be given a financial "reward" for doing so. Funding should be allocated to programs that are actually producing measurable results.
- Tracking what counts. An emphasis on funding methods to track outcomes is needed so that child welfare agencies are able to see their current position/ status in various areas, and hopefully be able to improve on these areas.

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- Government funding cannot promote accountability in my opinion, but the government has to take other actions to promote the issue of accountability. Harsher regulations and restrictions towards the State, and foster care agencies, by holding them more accountable for the health and safety of foster children in the system.
- Tougher review standards and accountability measures. One issue I know my state faces is the lack of documentation. I think that things like this should be penalized until the agencies or states do what is expected of them.
- Hold social workers more accountable, more frequent court reviews, more frequent reviews of foster parents, increase frequency of social worker visits with children.

D. Stability?

- Stability is important and maybe we should require states to document not only every time a child is moved but find out why the child is been removed. We have to keep children in homes and not have them bouncing around in the system.
- Federal Dollars can be used to reward foster parents who commit to raising a child until they either (1) age out, (2) are reunified with their parents or (3) get adopted. Foster kids and caseworkers would play a crucial role by being candid about whether a placement is suitable for the child (because we wouldn't want parents keeping kids if they didn't want to and as a result treated them poorly). We also wouldn't want a child staying in a home that is not safe and does not promote a healthy environment for the child.
- Educational stability is also very important. Federal dollars can be used to reward schools for ensuring that they obtain the educational records from the child's former school. Also federal dollars can be used to place a person(s) in a child's life who would be their educational advocate from the start to finish of each child's formative years of education.
- Fund and encourage states to implement mentoring programs. Keep kids in their "home schools"; encourage family/kin visits, and allow for regular sibling visits if it's not possible to keep siblings together.

SECTION 2

Labels Matter

By Lakeshia Dorsey

The Problem

When it comes to special education services, foster youth are both over-represented as well as under-served. Foster youth are identified for special education services at three times the rate of the general population (13% v. 40% respectively) (Wong, 2009). In fact, research shows that between 30%-52% of all foster youth are enrolled in special education (National Council on Disabilities, 2008). If this rate accurately portrayed a need, it would be slightly less concerning. What makes this trend so problematic is there is evidence that demonstrates a significant number of foster youth have been incorrectly identified as needing special education services. In addition to being systematically mislabeled, foster youth are more often underserved by the special education system once labeled. For a population that already struggles to maintain educational equity, this trend is concerning to say the least. The federal government should take immediate action to ensure that the label “in need of special education” is only used to refer to a foster child truly in need of special education services and once such a label is applied, that it results in the delivery of high quality and effective services.

Foster youth are overrepresented in special education

As stated above, there is a disproportionate representation of foster youth in special education. Evidence suggests that foster youth may be mislabeled as needing special education services because they are behind in school due to a lack of stability in their personal lives. When a child’s foster care residence changes, his or her school placement often changes as well (Vera Institute of Justice, 2004). Multiple transfers often result in the unavailability or loss of required school records, which can lead to delays in school registration (VIJ, 2004). These delays often cause a child to start the academic year late as compared to their peers. Additionally, each transfer requires the student to adjust to new teachers, environments and curriculum. Too many transfers can also cause a child to disengage and give up on school as well as fall behind academically (VIJ, 2004). This may lead school teachers and administrators to identify a child as needing special education services, when in reality all that child may need is a stable school placement.

Additionally, due to a lack of financial resources, services such as tutoring and after school programs may not be available to assist students who need to catch up academically. Therefore, for foster youth genuinely in need of academic support services, enrolling them in special education may be the only access they have to such academic support. As a result, individuals who have a sincere interest in seeing a child succeed may recommend that they enroll in special education in an effort to get them the services needed to help them improve their academic performance, even though special education may not be the appropriate placement for the child.

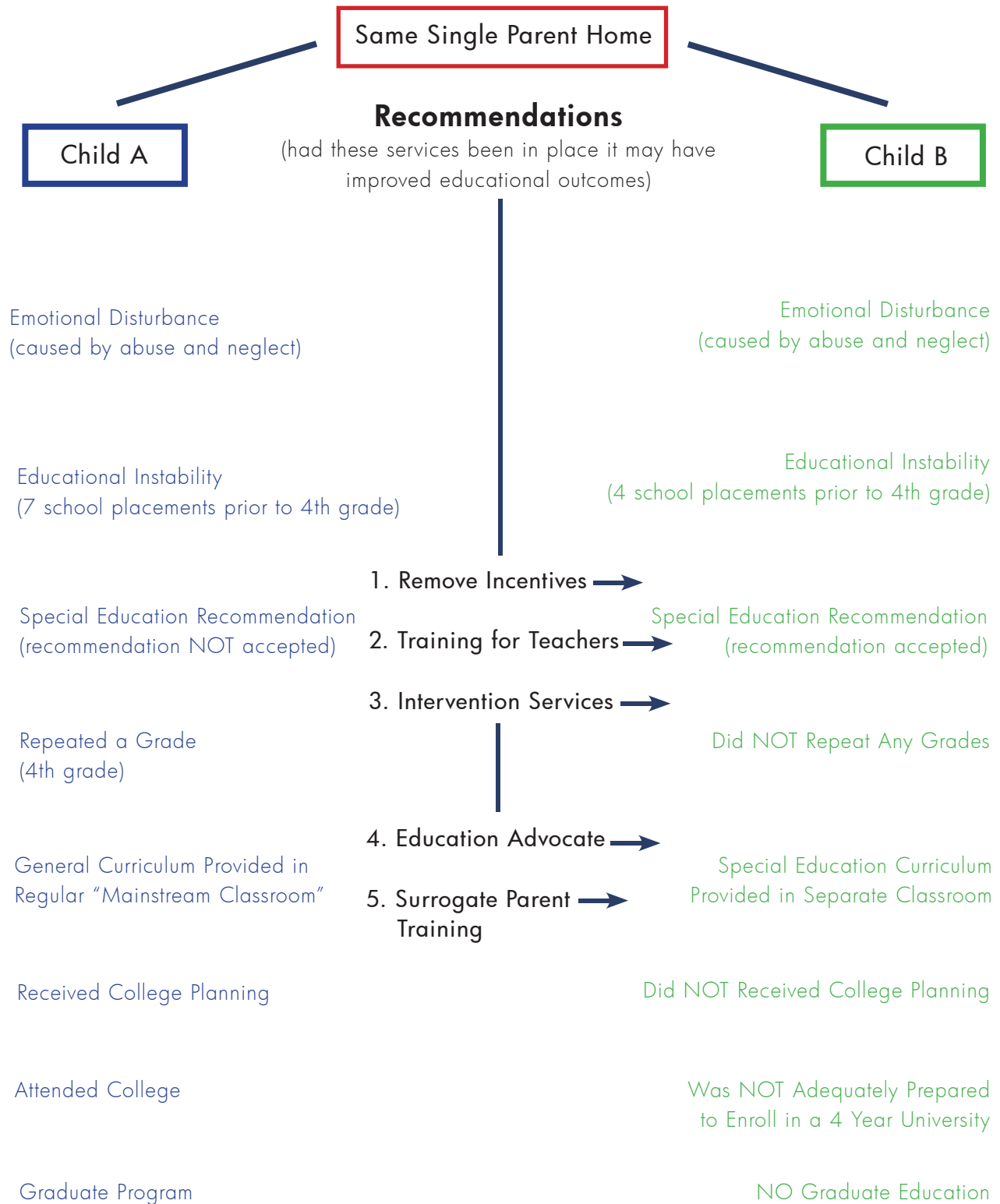
SECTION 2

Research also shows that a significant number of foster youth who suffer from temporary behavioral problems, caused by placement instability and entry into care, are enrolled in special education services even though they do not necessarily need them (McNaught, 2005; Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004). Moreover, 70% of children diagnosed as having learning disabilities actually have not received proper reading instruction in earlier grades (Lyon & Fletcher, 2001). From this study researchers concluded that proper reading instruction rather than special education is what these students need in order to perform up to their grade level standards (Lyon & Fletcher, 2001). Also, evidence suggests that foster youth might be recommended for special education due to the recommender's low expectation of their educational achievement (Fowler et al., 2008). If teachers and administrators were better informed about the challenges that children in the foster care system face, perhaps they would be less inclined to improperly identify them as needing special education services.

Even more concerning is the evidence that shows that there is a disproportionate number of foster youth enrolled in special education due to financial incentives (Lyon & Fletcher, 2001). Under the current funding system there is a clear fiscal incentive to identify foster youth as needing supplemental services, such as tutoring, or special education placement (Parrish et. al, 2003). Currently, payments are higher for foster youth who are labeled as needing special education. This is because there is a perception that more financial assistance is required in order to rear "special needs" children and provide them with the academic support they need. As a result, group homes, foster parents and other institutions that take in foster children, receive higher payments for foster youth who are enrolled in special education. This financial structure creates an incentive to label foster youth as students requiring special education even when they are not in need of such services.

Mislabeled children for special education services can have a long lasting negative impact on their self esteem and can artificially limit a child's educational attainment by placing them in a group severely at risk of poor educational outcomes. Research shows that students enrolled in special education experience lower educational outcomes than students who are not enrolled in special education, regardless of whether they are in foster care or not (National Council on Disabilities, 2008). Moreover, 34% of youth in special education enroll in college, as compared to 60% of youth in general education (NCD, 2008). Furthermore, 47.6% of students enrolled in special education receive their high school diplomas, as compared to 70% of students in general education (NCD, 2008). Additionally, studies show that counselors and teachers who work with special education students have lower expectations for those students as compared to expectations for students in the general population (NCD, 2008). The above statistics illustrate the importance of accurately recommending a child for special education. Placing a foster child in special education who is not in need of such placement greatly diminishes his or her chances of educational success. To further illustrate this point, please see the diagram on the following page:

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SECTION 2

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS To ensure that foster youth are being properly served and not overrepresented by being placed in special education services, Congress should:

Require that all states provide foster youth with intervention services before enrolling them in special education

Under IDEA, students who are behind in school due to circumstances, such as a lack of educational stability, are eligible for special education services. In practice, due to the frequent mobility of children in the foster care system, many foster youth are identified as needing special education services because they are more likely to fall behind in school. However, while it is important to ensure that students perform up to their appropriate grade level in order to increase their chances of educational success, it is also equally important not to unnecessarily place a stigma on children by labeling them as requiring special education when other services or programs are available to help them perform up to grade level standards.

Instead of automatically enrolling a foster child into special education, students should be provided with intervention services, such as tutoring or after school programs, to assist them in meeting the school's academic expectations and competition against their peers. Children should only be enrolled in special education if these services are ineffective in helping them perform up to standard.

Require that teachers receive training on the unique needs of foster children to avoid misidentification for special education services

Due to the unique developmental background of many foster youth, which often includes frequent changes in home and school placement and emotional distress caused by abuse and neglect, foster youth may exhibit behavioral issues that may be misunderstood as a lack of intellectual ability. Oftentimes, teachers are unaware of the students in their class who are in foster care and have not been properly trained to handle the unique challenges they face. As a result, teachers are at risk of mistaking a child's behavioral or emotional needs as an indication of their intellectual ability and may inappropriately recommend them for special education services. Teachers should be required to be able to identify the foster children who are in their classrooms. Moreover, they should be trained on the unique needs of this vulnerable population and be educated on how to best serve them. One aspect of the training should include a comprehensive list of some of the behaviors that may be displayed by this population which signal that the child may be in need of services, such as therapy and counseling, rather than special education. Teachers should also be required to meet with the child, as well as his or her caseworkers and others involved in the child's education, at the beginning of the foster child's class enrollment.

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Foster youth are underserved once placed in special education

In addition to foster youth being overrepresented in special education, once labeled as special education students, many of these youth are also underserved in receiving appropriate educational support services. Therefore, not only are foster youth being misdiagnosed as needing special education services, these youth are also falling even farther behind because they are not receiving the appropriate services they are entitled to by law.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) is the major federal statute addressing the education of children with disabilities. The presumption of this legislation is that children with disabilities have parents and guardians who are actively involved and concerned with the child's education. The Act gives parents the authority to make important decisions affecting the child's education (Geenen & Powers, 2006). However, when a child is in foster care it is often difficult, if not impossible, to get the biological parents involved in making educational decisions for the child. In fact, some studies show that in some states as many as 90% of foster youth's birth parents do not participate in any special education processes concerning their child (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Moreover, studies have shown that there is a strong positive correlation with children receiving appropriate and higher quality special educational services when there is a parent present advocating on their behalf (Geenen & Powers, 2006).

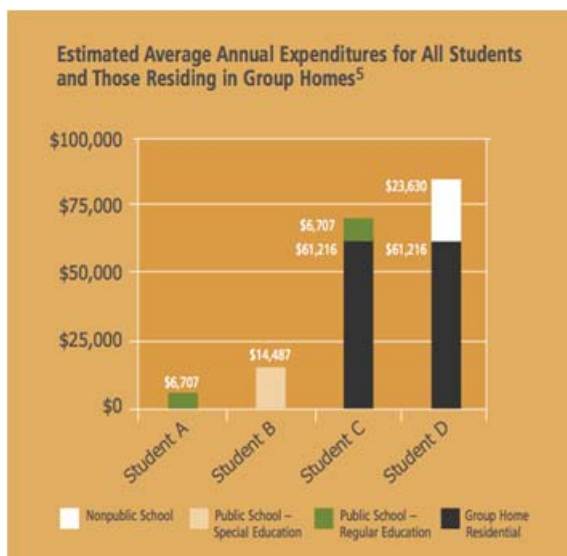
Children whose parents have had their parental rights terminated often do not fare much better. When a child does not have a "parent" as defined by IDEA, IDEA requires that a surrogate parent be appointed by the school district in a timely fashion. The surrogate parent would hold the educational rights of the foster youth and have the authority to make any decision pertaining to the foster youth's academics. The IDEA regulations do not allow a parent surrogate to be an employee of an educational agency or any person with a "conflict of interest" (Your Rights Under IDEA, 2010). Thus, this provision of IDEA excludes teachers and caseworkers from becoming surrogate parents to foster youth (Geenen & Powers, 2006). As a result, foster parents are frequently appointed as surrogate parents. This can be problematic in some cases due to the fact that foster youth, especially those in special education, frequently change schools (Geenen & Powers, 2006; Casey Family Programs, 2004). Therefore foster youth in special education are also consistently changing surrogate parents. Consequently in foster youth in special education often lack a caring, stable adult to consistently advocate for their educational needs, including investigating whether they are in need of special education services. Moreover, research shows that foster parents often lack knowledge about special education policy and are therefore required to trust that recommendations for special education services made by teachers and administrators are made accurately (Geenen & Powers, 2006).

Evidence also shows that foster youth are at a greater risk of receiving inadequate special education services when placed in a group home. Because school districts receive no additional funding for foster youth enrolled in special education in public settings, but receive complete reimbursements when special education services are provided for foster youth in non-public schools (NPS), many foster youth are placed in NPS (Parrish et. al 2001). In fact, studies show that over 46% of group home youth are educated in NPS, which are often located on group home campuses (Parrish, 2001). While NPS

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placement is beneficial for some foster youth, studies have shown that NPS placement is not desirable for students who do not require such a restrictive placement (Lyon & Fletcher, 2001, National Council on Disabilities, 2008). One foster youth reported that “the problem with the so called” school she attended while in a group home she [had] to share one teacher with a classroom full of younger kids, [and she did not] have access to the computer or books she had in high school (Todd, 2004). Another youth reported that she was not allowed to learn algebra because her professor told her that because he did not know it, he could not teach it (National Center for Youth Law, 2004). This is just one example of how foster youth placed in group homes are at risk of receiving inadequate education due to special education placement. Moreover, placing students in NPS who do not require such placement is legally problematic because it is a clear violation of IDEA, which requires that youth enrolled in special education be placed in the least restrictive environments possible (Jones, 2010). As stated

above, foster youth are more likely than other youth enrolled in special education to be placed in inappropriate restrictive environments (Geenen & Powers, 2006).



The graph to the left illustrates how the current system contains fiscal incentives to place youth residing in group homes, foster family homes and foster family agency homes into special education provided by non-public schools (California Department of Education, 2004).

See chart: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/fg/fr/se/documents/fosteryth.pdf> Estimated Average Annual Expenditures for All Students and Those Residing in Group Homes

The fact that studies indicate that foster youth are further underserved by the services they receive while in special education further illustrates the need to appropriately identify foster youth for special education. Placing a foster child in special education who is not in need of such services can significantly affect a foster child’s ability to reach academic standards. Studies show that within the special education community, foster youth experience a double disadvantage as well as poorer educational outcomes than their special education counterparts (NCD, 2008). Foster youth are less likely to have access to or receive a school counselor and are less likely to have an educational advocate (Geenen & Powers, 2008; NCD, 2008). Furthermore, IDEA requires states and schools to place students enrolled in special education in the least restrictive placements possible. However as stated above, despite this statute, studies show that a large percentage of foster youth in special education end up in more restrictive settings than justified (Geenen & Powers, 2006). In addition, some research shows that foster youth in special education are put on educational plans that do not include post-secondary education as compared to other youth in special education (Geenen & Powers, 2006). Additionally, once enrolled in special education, children in foster care are less likely to return to the regular classroom as compared to other students in special education (2% v. 10% respectively) (Carter, 2002).

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These disparate outcomes and inequalities within the special education system illustrate how critically important it is to appropriately identify and enroll foster youth in special education. Misdiagnosing a youth for these services severely handicaps a foster youth's chances of educational success.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS To ensure that foster youth are being properly served and not underserved, Congress should:

Require that an education advocate be trained and assigned to every foster child in special education

Generally, children in special education have at least one parent who serves as their educational advocate. A non-parental educational advocate does not hold the child's legal educational rights and, therefore, they do not have the authority to make decisions about the child's education. However, they do play a critical role in ensuring that youth receive an appropriate education. To address the unique challenges and barriers to education faced by foster youth, an educational advocate should be assigned to foster youth enrolled in or at risk of being enrolled in special education. The educational advocate would serve as a liaison between the school and the child welfare system and would advocate on behalf of the foster youth to ensure that they are properly diagnosed as needing special education services. Moreover, if a foster child ends up enrolled in special education, the educational advocate would ensure that the foster youth is receiving adequate education services and that these services are implemented in the least restrictive environment possible.

Require that surrogate parents be trained on the unique needs of foster youth in special education.

Currently, federal education law, including IDEA, assumes parental involvement and oversight to ensure that a child receives an appropriate education. Parents have the ability to attend parent-teacher conferences, return phone calls, ensure that their students are enrolled in the appropriate classes, and most importantly, make essential legal decisions regarding their child's education. Unfortunately, many foster youth lack parents to play this critical role. As a result, they are more susceptible to routine lapses within special education including, but not limited to, over-identification and lack of compliance. IDEA requires that in the absence of a biological parent, there be a surrogate parent assigned to make informed legal decisions regarding a child's education. Not only does there need to be more accountability in making sure that every child receives an adequate surrogate parent, the federal government should also amend IDEA to require that individuals who play the role of surrogate parents be required to enroll in training on special education law and how to properly advocate and make legal decisions regarding their child's education. This training should not only include a comprehensive understanding of special education law, but also provide training on the unique challenges that can affect a foster youth's educational progress. Parents should also be informed about alternative services that may better suit their foster child's educational needs other than special education enrollment. Some examples include tutoring, counseling, mentoring and skill building workshops.

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Require states to remove financial incentives that encourage placing foster youth into special education.

Youth in foster care, especially those in group homes are frequently educated in substandard, unregulated and unequal schools located on group home campuses. (National Center for Youth Law, 2004). Current existing law gives school districts a financial incentive to put foster youth in placements that are restrictive, unnecessary and quite frankly, illegal (National Center for Youth Law, 2004). Reimbursements for special education services in some states are linked to whether foster youth are placed in public or private settings. School districts do not receive any reimbursement for services when foster youth are placed in public settings. However, districts receive a complete reimbursement when foster youth are placed in private settings. This provides an incentive for group homes, for example, to over identify foster youth as needing special education services and then subsequently place them in private settings such as NPS (National Center for Law and Youth, 2004). Following the lead of states such as California, Congress should require all states to pass laws that remove financial incentives that encourage enrolling foster youth into special education services when they are not in need of such services.

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Serving the Underserved: Children of Undocumented Immigrants

By Marjorie Delgado

According to The National Survey of Child and Adolescent Well-Being (NSCAW), 9.6% of all children involved with the child welfare system are children of **undocumented immigrant** parents and 2.3% of all children within the child welfare system are **undocumented immigrants** themselves (emphasis added). Undocumented immigrant foster children are a vulnerable population faced with unique challenges in a child welfare system which already struggles to take care of the needs of all those within its purview. More specifically, undocumented immigrant children are more likely to be denied access to social “safety net” services, they are more likely to be indigent, and they can be victims of cultural misunderstanding. While the experience of being removed from one’s family is traumatic for any child, it is even more so for undocumented immigrant children. With this in mind, the federal government should do more to ensure that the needs of undocumented immigrant children are being sufficiently addressed.

As of 2010, there were approximately 11.2 million undocumented immigrants in the United States. Of these individuals, approximately 1 million are undocumented children. (Pew Hispanic Center, 2011, p. 1). According to the same report, 350,000 of the children (eight percent of all newborns) born in 2009 were born to undocumented immigrant parents. Undocumented immigrant children are at a higher risk of being placed in the foster care system because their parents are more likely to be denied access to social services. Undocumented immigrant parents have limited access to the services that would help them remain in control of their finances and able to care for their children. These services include welfare, food stamps, healthcare, and other government services that would otherwise be available to a parent with a social security number.

Language barriers and fear of the government also contribute to undocumented immigrant families’ difficulties in accessing social services. According to Karina Fortuny, author of “Children of Immigrants: 2008 State Trends Update,” undocumented immigrant families face difficulty in obtaining social services due to language barriers and fears of dealing with government agencies. The fear of deportation and persecution from the government causes undocumented immigrant families to refrain from applying for and using public benefits. Also, it is almost impossible for undocumented immigrant families to pass the language barriers to obtain services from an English dominated agency when they do not speak the language. “Part of what might account for the disproportionate poverty level of undocumented immigrant families is that undocumented immigrant families do not utilize public benefits as much as non-undocumented immigrant families” (Fortuny, 2010).

Undocumented immigrants are more likely to experience poverty due to the lack of jobs for which they are qualified because of language barriers and having an unmarketable skill-set, making it more difficult to financially support their children. “Undocumented immigrant children and children of undocumented immigrants are more likely to live in poverty than children of native born citizens” (Casey Family Programs, 2009).

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Undocumented immigrant children also face challenges associated with cultural misunderstandings. In the current foster care system, it is not widely understood that cultural norms in one country do not transition to another country, and this often leads to a negative bias against undocumented immigrant families. These misunderstandings include norms for child supervision and housing situations. For example, some cultures count on young children to care for even younger siblings or infants (Schmidt, 2006). Many child welfare agencies may categorize this as a form of inadequate child supervision and classify it as a form of neglect. Also, it may be healthy and normal in some communities, particularly the Hispanic community, to live with extended family in the same household. This may be culturally misunderstood and children have been removed from these situations due to mislabeled neglect.

While the experience of care can be traumatic for any child, it is often more so for an undocumented immigrant child. These undocumented children are thrown into a foster care system in which they do not know their legal rights and state agencies together with the judicial system are not informing them of said rights. More often than not, they are afraid to identify themselves as being illegal and in need of services due to the fear of being deported. “In A study by Columbia University Law School Child Advocacy and Immigration Clinic, of the 15,000 children who enter foster care in New York every year, approximately 150 have no listed immigration status. For some children, just the mere involvement of the government in their lives supports their ever present fear that they will be detained or deported.” In addition, these undocumented immigrant children are coming from homes where their primary language is not English and they often have trouble communicating with their foster family as well as in school and other areas in their new environment, which is both a sociological challenge and an alienating experience. “There are not enough services for non-English speakers in the child welfare system, i.e., hotline workers, social workers, psychologists, CASAs, and attorneys” (Leung & Lincroft, 2006). Because of this language and cultural divide, undocumented immigrant children experience isolation in connection with their constant fear of the government and general alienation from society. According to a 2007 study conducted by the Urban Institute, psychologists and other mental health professionals have suggested that the feelings of social exclusion and isolation that often follow [ICE] raids might induce depression and accentuate psychological distress among some parents and children (Capps, Castaneda, Chaundry, & Santos, 2007).

The federal government recognized the unique challenges for undocumented immigrants when passing legislation called Special Immigration Juvenile Status (SIJS). SIJS is extremely important because, if the child in question meets certain criteria, he or she is eligible to obtain permanent residency within the United States through a green card. Once this status is obtained, the federal government will contribute to the cost of needed services. Without it, services can only be provided with state and local dollars. The process for obtaining SIJS is set forth hereto in the attached Exhibit “A”. According to research conducted by the Annie E. Casey Foundation, it is imperative that the children’s right to apply for green card status is communicated to them because this is a basic freedom available to all undocumented immigrant foster children within a certain paradigm (Leung & Lincroft, 2006). Caseworkers and Court Appointed Special Advocates (CASAs) must be properly trained as to the SIJS legislation so that this information can be properly communicated. “Since SIJS requires several steps the process may take up to two years before United States Citizenship and Immigration Services reaches a deci-

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sion. Experts say that the biggest challenge right now is to identify children early so that they can start applying for SIJS” (Aryal, 2011).

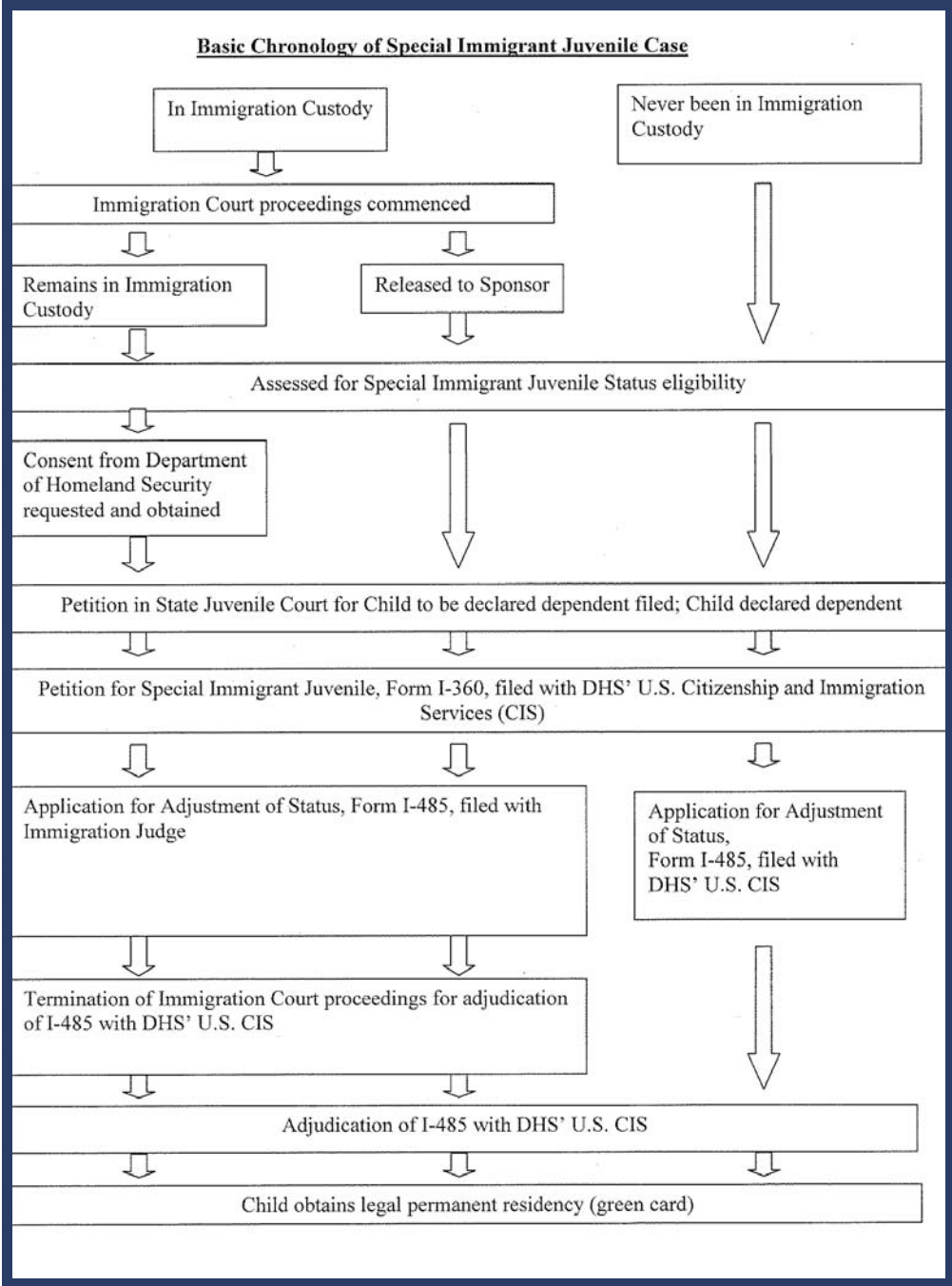
As it stands, advocacy for this program and communication to the eligible youth are failing. “[M]ost advocates are convinced that child welfare agencies and the courts have failed to inform eligible youth in a timely manner of their right to apply for SIJS” (Leung & Lincroft, 2006).

There must be specialized training for people working within the child welfare system so that they are better able to serve the needs of undocumented immigrant families and children. Caseworkers, CASAs and foster parents all need to be prepared for the linguistic, cultural, sociological and emotional needs that undocumented immigrant children may have. Per Title VI of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, any establishment in receipt of federal funding must provide services and programs that are reasonably accessible to persons with limited English skills. Virtually every state and locality connected to social services is receiving federal funding, which means that linguistic services should be available to this currently alienated population (cite Underserved, Undercounted, etc <http://www.aecf.org/upload/PublicationFiles/IR3622.pdf>). These state agency workers must also be prepared to ask children relevant questions in order to determine their needs. For example, a caseworker needs to be prepared to determine the legal status of the child and their linguistic needs in order to obtain the necessary services for that child. The CASA must have adequate knowledge in legal immigration matters and the SIJS program in order to make accurate and helpful recommendations in the best interest of the child. “Throughout the child welfare system, there are not enough interpretation/translation services or bilingual staff members at all levels – hotline workers, social workers, psychologists, CASA workers, and attorneys,” (cite undercounted, underserved <http://www.aecf.org/upload/PublicationFiles/IR3622.pdf>). Furthermore, foster parents must be trained more heavily and have more knowledge about the plight of undocumented immigrant children, including sensitivity training to their cultural and linguistic needs.

Documented and undocumented immigrant children within the foster care system deserve the same basic rights and freedoms that are granted to children in other demographics, yet the child welfare system is not set up to allow these children to access the services that they deserve. In order to reform the foster care system and thus serve one in every ten children within this system, the state and federal governments must act now to support this critical population.

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Exhibit "A"



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Improving Accountability by Tracking Youth Outcomes within Child Welfare

By Linda Lee Zambito

Lost in the System: Rosie's Story

As with most youth in care, Rosie entered foster care as a small child because of the unsafe environment her parents exposed her to. From then on, Rosie bounced around to seven foster homes before she "aged out"* or transitioned from foster care at age eighteen. She was never adopted by a permanent family and never had the opportunity to develop any permanent relationships. Thus, on her eighteenth birthday, because the state now deemed Rosie an adult the state foster care system relinquished its responsibility of her. She was free to live out her life whatever way she pleased. But there was one problem, Rosie was dependent on the child welfare system. She left the system without adequate preparation to thrive in the real world. Rosie did not know how to "live" or how to take care of herself because the state child welfare agency had always told her what to do or not to do her whole life.

Definition:

*** Aged out" or "Transitioned from Care" are means when a youth in foster care reaches 18 or 21 years old (depending on each state) and has not been reunified or adopted exits the foster care system and is deemed independent.**

The tragedy in Rosie's story is not just that she aged out of care unable to develop permanent relationships or take care of herself, but that the child welfare agency was neither aware of or held accountable for Rosie's ultimate well-being. While Rosie was in care, the child welfare agency was required to collect information on several factors, such as how many times her social worker visited the home, or whether she was enrolled in school. What the agency was not expected to report on were details pertinent to her life outcomes such as her educational attainment, mental health, and emotional and social development. The agency was not even asked to report on whether Rosie was self-sufficient enough to live independently. To the child welfare agency, the only outcome that mattered regarding Rosie was that she aged out from care.

It's Time to "Measure What Counts"

Rosie's experience of getting lost in a system which was intended to help her is one that happens to countless youth in the foster care system. This is even more unforgivable in this modern era where technology facilitates broad access to a wide range of information and resources. The federal government has implemented several pieces of laudable legislation in hopes of promoting successful development and positive outcomes for youth. They have supported states in the removal of 408,425 children from unsafe homes (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011) and contributed 5 billion federal dollars annually toward their care (Children's Defense Fund, 2004). But what they have not done is ensure that the system is actually helping youth.

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There are many inefficiencies in the child welfare system, and it is no doubt in dire need of simultaneous reform in multiple areas. One leading problem that causes an extensive negative ripple effect in the lives of youth in our child welfare system is the lack of accountability in this system generally, and more specifically the lack of effective program evaluation of services provided to the youth in foster care. Under current law, no data collection system directly links outcomes of youth to the funding provided. Current data tracking systems such as the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), and assessments such as the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR) fall short of linking the life outcomes of youth, such as (but not limited to) life skills, education, physical and mental health, normalcy, self-sufficiency and permanency, to the funding allocated to the child welfare system for these purposes. The more recently implemented National Youth Transition Database (NYTD) does track life outcomes of youth in care, however, it too falls short in only tracking older youth (17, 19, and 21 year olds) and does not link the potential success of these outcomes to the federal dollars states are receiving to provide child welfare services.

True reform of the foster care system depends on whether we are willing and able to measure “what counts” – and what counts are the life outcomes of youth both in and after aging out of care. Until the child welfare system and the funding that supports it are structured in a way that both tracks and supports successful outcomes, reform will continue to be constrained, and the success of our youth in foster care will continue to be thwarted.

Current Assessments Measure the Wrong Things in the Wrong Ways

Correcting the accountability gap in the child welfare system is a matter of putting the cart before the horse. The current system lacks crucial data on the life outcomes of youth in foster care because we have gotten ahead of ourselves. Unlike in the business sector, where systems are designed from the beginning toward successful goals and outcomes, government leaders at both the state and federal level have been allowed to continue to approve funding without a comprehensive understanding of what those dollars are responsible for. Consider this: the first attempt to create a standard for measuring outcomes of the foster care system came about in 1995 (Public Welfare, 2010), almost a half a century after the initial child welfare legislation funding Title IV-E of the Social Security Act in 1961 was authorized.

Beginning in 1995, Congress began to require states receiving Title IV-E funding for foster care to develop a collection system to track “quality data.” This first data collection system, called the Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS), currently collects demographic information from every state on all children in foster care who have been in care twenty-four hours or longer. More specifically, the AFCARS system houses information on children who are adopted while in the care of public child welfare agencies, and basic information on their foster and adoptive parents (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). This tracking system is inadequate because it does not track qualitative aspects such as the life outcomes from when youth enter and exit foster care, and only focuses on point in time data such as placement outcome or number of case manager visits. It has proven unable to support effective policy development of program evaluation.

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The Child and Family Service Review (CFSR), instituted by the federal government in 2005, assesses how well states are conforming to current federal legislation by using AFCARS data to analyze systemic and outcome factors of states (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). CFSR collect qualitative data of the youth's placement such as: protecting children from abuse and neglect, maintaining the safety of children in any living situation, and ensuring permanency and stability in their living situations. CFSRs also track systemic factors by implementing statewide information system case reviews, quality assurance systems, and foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment, and retention. But, the only two actual life outcome areas for youth that the CFSR track are whether children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs and whether youth receive adequate services to meet their physical and mental health needs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care made suggestions in May of 2004 on how to improve accountability within child welfare, and recommended that the "CFSR make use of longitudinal data, rather than point-in-time data, to produce more complete and accurate assessments of state performance in child welfare service delivery" (Children's Defense Fund, 2004).

And in 1999, the Foster Care Independence Act mandated the creation of an assessment system to track "youth [outcomes] in eleven broad categories: independent living needs assessment; academic support; post-secondary educational support; career preparation; employment programs or vocational training; budget and financial management; housing education and home management training; health education and risk prevention; family support and healthy marriage education; mentoring; and supervised independent living" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Despite this clear mandate from Congress, the federal government did not launch this youth outcome-based assessment, now called the National Youth Transition Database (NYTD), until 2008 and it is only now, in 2011, that NYTD is being implemented by states.

Though there is an extreme need to track youth outcomes at all ages, NYTD only targets older youth, and is designed to collect youth outcome data from a random cohort of youth at ages 17, 19, and 21. Utilizing such a limited group does not result in a full evaluation of the quality of services the child welfare agencies are required to provide to youth while they are in care and therefore leaves legislators without a comprehensive understanding of how to more effectively provide services that facilitate the goal of improving the life outcomes of these youth. An effective database that will produce outcome-driven results needs to incorporate data from children at a younger age than seventeen, and assess where the foster care system is unable to provide youth in care with the skills and services they need to be successful.

Understanding Accountability

Let's delve briefly into the development and concept of accountability. The etymology of the word "accountability" can have its roots traced back to its origin in the Latin word "accomptare" (to account) and a prefixed form of "computare" (to calculate). But the word did not emerge in English until the thirteenth century (Absolute Astronomy, 2010). While businesses have historically incorporated the concept of accountability into their plans, accountability has only more recently surfaced in child

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welfare and government sectors. Though accountability has for the most part been incorporated into the methodology of the private for-profit sectors, a movement to fill internal accountability gaps within other industries has emerged as well. Although many private for-profit industries use systems-based approaches that entail process-based or management-based regulation* (as does child welfare), a movement for goal or outcome-oriented based systems* where firms and businesses are “expected to produce plans that comply with general criteria designed to promote the targeted social goal” has been gaining momentum (May, 2007).

Not only are many industries concerned with developing goal and outcome-based systems, these industries are also striving to develop regulatory criteria or continual methods for monitoring by “specify[ing] elements that each plan should have, such as the identification of hazards, risk mitigation actions, procedures for monitoring and correcting problems, employee training policies, and measures for evaluating and refining the firm’s management with respect to the stated social objective (May, 2007)”

In other words, this is the development of indicators or benchmarks to gauge the status of outcomes. In the private for-profit sector, regulatory rules detail the elements of the plan. Compliance is determined by whether a firm has an acceptable plan, not on the basis of detailed adherence to prescriptions or outcomes of the production process. Deficiencies in regulatory outcomes are viewed as potential indicators of defects in the management plan.

An example of applying a best business practice to child welfare was when Molly McGrath, Director of the Baltimore City Department of Social Services at a recent meeting of the U.S. Senate Caucus on Foster Youth stated: “I am in charge of a multi-million dollar company.” This business attitude towards managing governmental affairs such as child welfare allows the integration of effective business models and better performance by child welfare administrators because there is direct responsibility for accountancy and the services provided to the youth. The method of constructing indicators while measuring outcomes, similar to business practices, detects potential defects or inefficiencies in the management plan.

Seeking Better Youth Outcomes from Business Best Practices

Despite legislation that has the specific intent of improving the success of youth in foster care, data and reports consistently show that youth in foster care are not doing as well as their counterparts in mainstream society, especially in the area of education (National Working Group on Foster Care and Education, 2006). This disparity in the success of children in foster care versus children in permanent settings clearly lays out the deeper issue at hand. It is not enough to create legislation and expect

Definition:

***Systems-based approaches that entail process-based or management-based regulation- these approaches are closely concerned with the inputs and outputs that make a process or management system function.**

***Goal or outcome-oriented based systems entail expanding beyond a firm or program’s inputs and outputs, and focus decision-making on better performance, outcomes and results.**

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positive outcomes to immediately proceed. The need for effective data collecting, tracking, and assessments especially on the life outcomes of youth can fill this accountability gap that is dwarfing the potential success of these child welfare programs. Legislators and child welfare oversight agencies can develop or assist in developing better and more effective data collecting systems and program evaluations by synthesizing the segmented assessment structures currently in place (AFCARS, CFSR, and NYTD) to a streamlined and “fluid” data collecting system (meaning developing a singular, accessible and manageable database system for all states to input procedural and outcome-based data). This data collection should act as the basis for federal funding allocations for foster care by both setting standards for states and letting states review their progress.

An Example in Macy’s Inc.

Macy’s Inc. is a great comparative example of effective data collection for the child welfare system. Even though this Fortune 500 Company has over 850 department stores across the nation (Macy’s, 2011), it is aware at all times of what its consumers want and are buying. This retailer acquires this consumer knowledge by tracking every sale ever made in a data collection system, and then examines and analyzes trends. Macy’s data system can be broken down by geographic regions, and even store by store, and although data can be segmented in this way the data collection remains streamlined and the ease of inputting and extracting data (its fluidity) is very manageable.

It is clear to the business world that developing indicators or benchmarks for desired goals and outcomes is essential to the success of an effective program or system. Macy’s Inc. exhibits yet another best practice by using indicators for their ever-changing market, and sending out progress reports to their sales associates every day, week, month and year. Thus the company is keenly aware of its market in order to provide services for customized needs.

Let’s apply this best practice to the child welfare system. Developing indicators, benchmarks and periodic progress reports for targeted child welfare goals and outcomes would allow increased awareness of how well each agency is improving life outcomes for youth in and exiting foster care, as well as the level of the agency’s conformity to child welfare legislation. Additionally, Macy’s Inc. not only dedicates a team of internal staff to data collection and evaluations, they also contract with external evaluators to aid in collecting and maintaining data to examine it and recognize trends. Child welfare agencies should also apply this best practice by contracting data analysis to external evaluators while also using an internal team to track, monitor and assess procedural and youth outcome data.

The child welfare assessment structure also needs to be altered from those systems of “penalization” to those of “incentivization.” Currently, states are penalized a small percentage of the federal funding allocated to them if they do not meet certain standards. Yet a system that penalizes states who are already performing poorly by reducing funding further is not beneficial. Instead, the system should provide funding incentives to those states that show significant improvement based on the outcomes-based indicators selected. This new incentivized system should begin at a baseline and from there, states who show improvement will receive a monetary incentive the following year and will continue to receive this incentive unless they regress from their improvement or reach the “per state cap of funding” allowed to be allocated.

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On a final note, the outcome-based data that is collected on foster youth needs to be collected at a younger age than is currently occurring. AFCARS tracks youth of all ages but focuses only on the placement and procedural outcomes, not qualitative youth outcome-based data. The National Youth Transition Database (NYTD) currently targets some 17, 19 and 21 year olds, but measuring life outcomes of younger youth who are in care will better assess their needs and allow child welfare agencies to begin providing and assisting youth with the appropriate services earlier when they enter care.

Accountability, Not a Means to an End

Better outcomes for youth who are in or have transitioned out of the foster care system will continue to be hindered by the mismanagement of resources and funds until the current accountability gap for child welfare systems is addressed with effective program evaluation, data collection and tracking, and the assessment of youth and procedural outcomes. These outcome-based, data-driven accountability reforms would result in better performance by state child welfare agencies. To be clear, accountability alone cannot ensure better or effective performance and outputs. The effectiveness of performance also depends on factors like continual monitoring and evaluation, the development of indicators or benchmarks of desired goals and outcomes, and measuring the appropriateness of needs versus existing resources. While the quality of any person's life cannot be solely measured and expressed in terms of data or by accountable methods, accountability will allow society to be more aware of and understand the needs and obstacles faced by youth who have been removed from their homes by the state and placed in foster care. Once we as a society reach awareness and understanding, innovation in child welfare will be able to emerge at its full potential and better improve the lives of all foster youth in every state.

Mental Health and Psychotropic Medication for Children in Foster Care

By Madison Sandoval-Lunn

Foster youth have a greater prevalence of psychotropic medication use, two to three times greater than that of the general youth population (Raghavan, et al., 2005). Part of the reason for such a disparity is that youth in foster care are more likely than youth in the general public to be prescribed medication to address a mental health need. In a national study comparing foster children with autism spectrum disorder to children in the general public with the same condition, 21% of foster children were prescribed three or more psychotropic medications concurrently compared to only 10% of those children in the general population (Rubin, 2009).

Although the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008 required state child welfare agencies to produce policy and guidelines to improve the oversight of mental health service delivery, including use of psychotropic medication to youth in foster care, empirical data shows that states are employing varying strategies in addressing the universal mental health issues among foster children. This is concerning for two reasons. First, mental health is a medical issue and as such, the needs of children with mental health issues do not vary by state. Second, the wide degree of variance suggests that states decisions regarding the use of psychotropic drugs are based more on system-level differences than on existing medical best practice research. In order to improve mental health treatment and hold states accountable for protecting youth in the foster care system, the federal government should set forth national minimum standards for the inappropriate and overuse of psychotropic medication.

Drugs are not the Answer

“Foster children are at particularly high risk for physical and mental health problems stemming from not only the maltreatment they have experienced but also the separation from their homes and families, and the continuing disruptions to their daily lives” (Geen, et. al., 2005). Up to 80% of foster youth have significant mental health issues compared to 18-22% of children in the general population (Dore, 2005).

The greater prevalence of mental health issues among foster youth does not, however, justify the assumption which too often exists among foster parents, child welfare professionals, or other adults involved in the foster child’s life that the best way to help alleviate issues is through medication. Research has shown other therapy models can be as, if not more, effective than the use of drugs. What is more, data suggests polypharmacy (more than one medication taken at the same time) is not effective in managing the multiplicity of problems displayed in foster care youth with serious behavioral and mental health problems who are often referred to as treatment-resistant or difficult to treat. (Lader & Naber, 1999).

It is also important to note that the continued and inappropriate use of psychotropic drugs can pose

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serious risks to a foster youth's physical health. "Every week a child dies from psychiatric drug effects in the U.S. Every week a child goes into a coma because of psychiatric drugs and every week a child commits suicide attributed to psychiatric drugs." (f News, 2011). Gabriel Myers committed suicide in his foster home's bathroom in 2009. He was seven years old and was one of many foster children subjected to clinical trials testing the safety of psychotropic medication. In light of these and other risks, state child welfare systems should be encouraged to invest in equally effective therapies rather than elect for medication as the only treatment technique.

Result of Poor Quality of Care in Mental Health

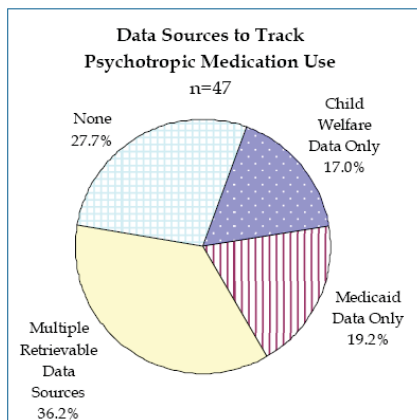
Overuse and over-reliance in the prescribing practices of psychotropic medication is contributed in part to inadequate psychiatric intake evaluations, a shortage of psychiatrists, pressure by stake holders (foster parents, social workers, and teachers) to control youth's behavior, and psychiatrist liability concerns (McMillen, J.C., Fedoravicius, N., Rowe, J., Zima, B.T., Ware, N., 2007). These and other pressures often result in children receiving too many medications and doses that are higher than necessary to help with the child's mental health issues (McMillen, et al, 2007). Because foster youth receive their health care through the publicly funded Medicaid program, where many of the above factors are more common, they have the "greatest likelihood of receiving complex, poorly evidenced, high cost medication regimens" (Zito, 2008).

Medicaid reimbursement policies also contribute to concerns over the quality of psychiatrists willing to work with foster children (McMillen, et al, 2007). Since Medicaid reimbursement rates are low, psychiatrists are more likely to decline foster children as patients, but rather accept other patients who can better compensate them for their time. This results in a shortage of highly qualified psychiatrists in the child welfare system. Lastly, mental health professionals note that the constant change in child placements can also result in changes in treatment strategy (McMillen, et al, 2007). Such discontinuities in the foster care system (placement changes and turnover among child welfare case managers) also affect the overall quality of psychiatric treatment.

Excessive State Variations

As was noted above, there is a high level of variance in rates of psychotropic drug use among states. This disparity is the direct result of system level issues. For instance, not all states have specialized staff positions within child welfare to assist in the oversight of psychotropic medication use (Tufts, 2010). Another example of state system level variance is how states collect and use data sources to track psychotropic medication use for children in foster care. Out of 47 states, 13 have no form of data source, 8 use child welfare data only, 9 use Medicaid data only, and 17 states use multiple retrievable data sources (Tufts, 2010). Finally, states also had a variance in the markers that were used in audits and case file reviews to identify problems with medication safety and quality of care. These markers include the use of psychotropic medication in young children between the ages of 3-6 years, the use of multiple psychotropic medications simultaneously, or no documentation of discussion of risks and benefits of medication (Tufts, 2010).

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These variances continue when reviewing states' policies and guidelines for prescribing psychotropic drugs, particularly on the subject of oversight. A 2010 multi-state research study indicates that there are the following state variances in oversight of psychotropic medication. Out of 47 states, 25 states had a written policy and guideline regarding psychotropic medication use, 13 were currently developing such policy and guidelines, and 9 had no policy or guideline regarding psychotropic medication use (Tufts, 2010).

To adequately meet the mental health needs of and prevent the overmedication of youth in foster care, policymakers should:

- Provide education and training about psychotropic medication use and issues unique to youth in foster care to stakeholder groups at the local and state level.
- Mandate all states to hire mental health staff with mental health expertise within the child welfare system.
- Create a standardized evaluation tool for states to determine the mental health of a child entering foster care in the child welfare system.
- Develop a centralized system within child welfare for informed consent. This eliminates delays and provides a database through which to track youth on medication.
- Develop a performance improvement plan around youth mental health issues as part of the federally mandated Child and Family Services Review process.
- Clarify a system for informed decision-making for medication use.
- Implement a national system for identifying promising practices and evaluating their impact on child welfare well-being.

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Making Returns on a Lifetime Investment

By Richard Terrell

*I am a success story.
I am someone who looked past my current situation and focused on future goals. I could not have done this without someone investing their time and money so that I could succeed. I believe that every foster youth should receive the same support as I did by someone investing in their future.*

As set forth below, I am an example showing that there is a direct correlation between the investment made in the youth in the foster care system and their ultimate level of success being measured in terms of employment and education. Based on a 2008 survey conducted by the Casey Family Programs, which provide services for young adults in foster care ranging from employment support services to workshops developing their independent living skills, of the 19-25 year old adults who participated in the Casey Family Programs, 82.7% were in the workforce (Havalchak, White, & O'Brien, 2008). This clearly shows that it is worthwhile to invest in the youth aging out of the foster care system.

Unfortunately, in the current foster care system, youth do not receive the full support and guidance that they need in order to move toward their professional careers. There are currently some great national programs that are designed to help foster youth become independent adults and offer some training with respect to professional development, such as the Casey Family Programs, the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, the Independent Living Program, and the Older Youth Program. There were also many similar programs created under the legislation of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998. These programs include the Job Corps, the Workforce Investment Act and the Youth Innovation Fund. However, none of these programs sufficiently and specifically address the issue of professional development and career training for foster youth. There must be a program available to foster youth that is geared toward their professional development and mentoring in order to enable them to obtain and retain professional skills and succeed in the job market.

The lack of professional development and guidance available to youth in the foster care system is a serious issue because these youth are failing on a grand scale with respect to obtaining successful employment and financially supporting themselves. In the Casey Family Programs Survey, 84.1% of former foster youth participating in the Casey Family Program had a household income three times below the poverty line after leaving care (Havalchak, White, & O'Brien, 2008). If foster youth had a nationwide program that was designed specifically to invest in their career development, they would have a much higher chance of obtaining employment. This is especially critical as data indicates that the number of foster youth aging out of the foster care system is increasing (First Focus, 2011). Programming that promotes success for foster youth needs to be available. Success in this context means choosing profes-

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sions and a futuristic viewpoint for their lives rather than choosing to live a life that has been set up for them, which often includes instability, low expectations, poverty and lack of direction. According to a Pennsylvania Council of Children, Youth, and Family Service's report, young people who leave foster care have an increased likelihood for economic stability and success if there is an intentional, integrated and well-coordinated set of supports in place (DiLorenzo, 2005).

As a former foster youth, I personally understand the importance of providing professional development within the foster care system. During my time in the foster care system, I felt as though my options were not communicated to me effectively, and I did not know how to work toward building a future. I only knew how to focus on the present. My social worker often talked with me about how the system could help me with immediate needs, such as health care and obtaining money for personal items, but not about my future plans of attending college and moving toward a professional career. Living in Minnesota, I was eligible to participate in the Independent Living Program (ILP)¹ and the Educational Training Voucher (ETV)². However, I did not have any knowledge about these programs. As a result of my experience, I was unaware of any programs available to help me pay for college and to prepare me for a professional career.

One extremely helpful program that I encountered during my time spent in the foster care system was the Step-Up program in Minneapolis, Minnesota. The Step-Up program is a public program for inner-city youth that provides youth from ages 14-21 the opportunity to gain valuable work experience in their field of interest, to network with people in the business environment, and to earn money during the summer. The youth also participate in academic enrichment classes at the University of Minnesota, financial literacy training at US Bancorp, and business mentoring relationships through the Target Corporation. In 2009, 96% of the youth participants felt their summer job was a valuable learning experience (AchieveMpls, 2009).

The youth participating in the Step-Up program also had a direct positive correlation with college enrollment. In 2005, 68.7% of the students applied to at least one two or four year college or university. In 2009, there was an increase in students applying to colleges with 85.9% applying. In 2005, 46.7% of high school graduates enrolled in a Minnesota institution of higher education. In 2009, the number of graduates increased to 59.7% (AchieveMpls, 2009).

While participating in Step-Up, I was able to work at a law firm in downtown Minneapolis, Minnesota. It has always been my dream to be an attorney, but I never thought that my past would allow me to have such a future. Being a part of the Step-Up program allowed me to see beyond the circumstances of my past and begin to see myself with a vision.

Footnotes:

¹ The ILP program provides independent living plan for a child age 16 or older that is in placement as a result of a permanency disposition (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2006).

² The ETV program helps provides opportunities for youth who age out of the foster care system to attend post-secondary education and training programs (Minnesota Department of Human Services, 2006).

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Based on my experience as one of the successful outcomes of the Step-Up program as well as my support for the core principles of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, I believe that there needs to be a national program designed to invest in professional training for foster youth.

I propose that Congress create a program called the Professional Development for Foster Youth (PDFY). The purpose of the program is to target foster youth from 16 to 21 years of age and to promote professional development by assisting current foster youth by helping them learn to create a resume, to prepare for an interview, to teach them how to dress in a professional environment, to receive the opportunity to interact with a mentor, and to gain work experience. The PDFY program would be offered at the beginning of January during the foster youth's junior year of high school. It would be a five month program with the objective of obtaining a summer job at the end of the program. While participating in the program, the youth would be able to shadow people in various occupations, and attend trainings and networking events to learn about professionalism. Each participant would also receive a lifelong mentor to help them through the process.

This federal program could be funded in one of two ways. First, it could be made a part of the Workforce Investment Act of 1998, a federal law designed to give young people between the ages of 14-21, who are low-income, the ability to overcome one of several barriers to employment (First Focus, 2011). The PDFY program would be a perfect use of funding provided under this bill because it services the population the bill was designed to support. Second, it could be funded and implemented alongside post secondary programs such as TRIO and Upward Bound, programs also designed to challenge youth to see beyond their immediate future.

The federal government might also consider provide participating small businesses and organizations a tax deduction when they hire and mentor interns who were in the foster care system. In order to qualify for the tax deduction, the businesses must show that they are teaching foster youth the structure of their business. They must also demonstrate that they are providing some form of a mentoring opportunity for the foster youth, such as pairing the foster youth intern or employee with an employee of the business. Participating businesses could also be required to provide the foster youth intern or employee professional training and to help the foster youth develop the skills applied by that career. The Step-Up program helped me to learn professionalism, how to obtain a job, and how to turn a job into a career. The opportunity that I received should be available to all foster youth. By implementing the solutions above, the foster youth will have a better chance of obtaining professional success. Just like me, all foster youth are a worthwhile investment.

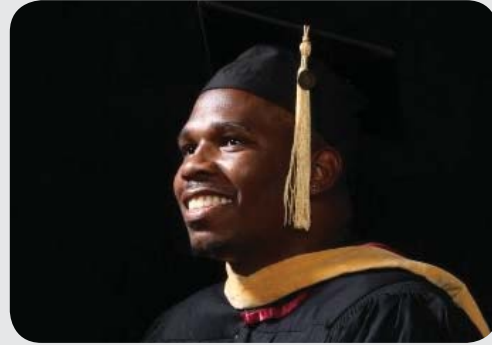
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Education Accountability for Children in Foster Care

By Derrick Riggins

“None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We got here because somebody a parent, a teacher, an Ivy League crony or a few nuns - bent down and helped us pick up our boots.”

-Justice Thurgood Marshall



As Justice Marshall eloquently stated, children in foster care and those aging out of foster care need help picking up their boot straps when it comes to overcoming the obstacles put in their way by the foster care system. According to the 2010 Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services) report, there were 408,425 children in foster care and 29,471 who emancipated from state care. Research shows that youth who leave foster care are more likely to drop out of high school, to be unemployed, and to be dependent on public assistance when compared to the other youth. These youth also experience mental health problems, drug use, and involvement with the criminal justice system (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004).

Among the numerous barriers that affect a youth’s ability to achieve his or her personal and professional goals is a lack of proper academic guidance and support. If the child welfare system continues to leave this need unaddressed, an entire generation of foster youth will be prevented from achieving their personal and professional goals. In order to ensure every that each member of the foster care population achieves his or her potential, more needs to be done to prevent children from falling behind academically while in care.

State Accountability for Education

Children who become a part of the child welfare system are essentially children whose personal development is monitored and assessed by the state in which they are residing. As such, states should be held directly accountable for the educational outcomes of children in the child welfare system. In 2005, the federal government implemented an accountability system called the Child and Family Services Reviews (CFSR). The CFSR was developed to measure the degree to which states are in substantial conformity with its stipulated outcomes regarding safety, permanency, and family and child well-being. The measured areas are those that are perceived to be necessary for states to improve the delivery of child welfare services and the outcomes of families and children who receive such servic-

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es. The CFSR process as a whole is designed to identify strengths and needs where technical assistance can lead to program improvement with state programs (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009).

Though all of the areas measured by the CFSR are important, the question of whether the foster care system is helping the youth entrusted to its care should be among the top. One would expect given the importance of a high quality education, the CFSR would have a series of measures on this topic. The reality, however, is that the CFSR inquiry is limited to a single question, “Do children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs?” This statement alone does not uncover information such as: What is a state doing to determine what particular services are appropriate to meet the child’s needs? Does the state effectively provide such services? Are such services effective? The lack of specificity in the CFSR’s investigation regarding whether the services necessary to accommodate for the foster child’s educational needs is ultimately a disservice to the foster child. This leads to children missing out on services they need to be successful. Also, states may neglect to focus on children’s education outcomes because the lack of specific guidelines and factors to be measured sends a signal to states that educational outcomes are not something which states will be held accountable for.

There is no doubt that states need to be held accountable to the foster child’s education outcomes, but doing so is only possible if we begin by asking ourselves what the outcomes are. Data derived from the CFSR and other performance based assessments can be used to guide states in implementing services to accomplish such objectives. For example, a child who is below grade level when he enters care and continues to stay below grade level after several years in the system is different from a child who enters the system as an infant and finds himself unable to complete highschool. The CFSR does not currently provide answers to these specific questions. Such information is needed for states to be able to investigate both why the child’s academic performance, and how to provide services to help the child reach his grade level educational outcomes.

Moreover, there are penalties that CFSR will impose upon states that are not in compliance. Currently, the Administration for Children and Families makes determinations about the State’s conformity with each of the outcomes and systemic factors following the review. If the state is not in compliance with meeting the outcomes that CFSR reviews, it must create and follow a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to correct the area of non-conformity. The PIP must be developed and submitted to the Regional Office for approval within 90 days of the state receiving written notice of non-conformity. Penalties are states that do not comply (Stoltzfus, 2008). However, it is impossible to get to the point of imposing such penalties, or in other words, to hold states accountable if there are no specific standards in place to measure how children are performing in school.

Solution: Improve the CFSR

A solution to this problem is improving the CFSR by adding more specific questions to the CFSR that truly focus on the child’s individual educational needs and not a general overview. There should be a rubric or detailed guidelines explaining what services are considered appropriate to meet a foster youth’s needs.

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Who is making the decisions for children in care?

Another way for improving education outcomes for children in care is by appointing a person to advocate for the educational needs and concerns for children in care. More often than not when children come into care, they lack an adult who would advocate on their behalf regarding critical education issues. This education-based decision maker would be an individual who has legal authority to make decisions for children in care. Under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), parents or guardians of students have access to the student's education records. This is unfortunate for those foster youth who are removed from their parent. These parents still possess rights to access the foster youth's educational records as well as make any legal decisions regarding the foster youth's academic future. However, if these parents are not actively involved in the foster youth's lives, this ultimately hurts the child since that parent is not likely to be involved in the education decisions for that foster youth (U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

Solution: Education Point Person

To ensure that the foster youth is receiving a proper education, there should be an education point person placed within the foster youth's school district. This person could be a school guidance counselor that works specifically with foster care youth. One example that shows the success of such an education point person is the Connected by 25 (CBY25) Hillsborough program in Tampa, Florida. This program was established in 2007 to provide technical assistance and training for agencies and organizations serving at-risk youth. CBY25 incorporates cutting edge tools with proven business practices that result in improved youth outcomes and maximizes resources for young people within each community. One of the programs CBY25 makes available is funding to provide a guidance counselor for youth in foster care in Hillsborough County. This guidance counselor is employed by the school district and is a Hillsborough county school employee, but whose position was initially funded by CBY25. The guidance counselor serves as a point person for each young person, assuming a parent's role in certain aspect of the youth's education. This person would be responsible for tracking and monitoring the student's progress, working with teachers to help select courses, and coordinating resources like tutoring and transportation for the children they work with. (Zambito 2011). In the 2008-2009 academic school year, as reported by the Hillsborough County Public Schools in June 2010, 77% of youth in foster care remained in school, compared to the national rate of 60% (Zambito, 2011) These figures demonstrate that the success of the program, since the percent of foster youth remaining in school surpassed the national rate. The methods of this program should not just serve the children in Hillsborough County, but should be implemented across the nation in every school district. Also, providing a counselor just for the foster youth population would ensure that someone is following the foster child's academic progress and that the child is on the right track with his or her schooling. Having an education point person for a child once he or she enters care is important to ensure that the child knows that someone is truly tracking his or her education outcomes, which also prove to the child that his educational success is important.

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Conclusion

President John F. Kennedy, in his 1962 address to Congress said, “A child miseducated is a child lost.” Education is important, and children in foster care deserve to receive the best quality education possible. As a nation we are failing in promoting the importance of education for kids in foster care. Education is the means for foster children to become the leaders of tomorrow. Education is a tool that can change the lives of the youth who are in the care of the state, and we should look at ways to improve the number of youth graduating and becoming successful after their time in care. The investment in a child’s future is priceless. Children who come into the child welfare system because of no fault of their own desire to be successful, but they need the support of adults and the state to achieve this success.

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Mentoring Foster Youth: An Investment in the Future

By Melanie Roberts

Over the past decade our lawmakers have implemented several initiatives to improve our country's foster care system. Many of these have proven effective as there has been a gradual yet consistent decline in the number of foster youth entering into care annually since 2005 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Inasmuch as reports have shown areas of progress, the system as a whole is still struggling with the fundamental concept of providing foster youth with the tools to succeed. Foster youth lack strong, healthy, and stable relationships stemming from the dysfunction in their biological home settings. One option for ensuring the success of foster youth is to provide them with a consistent and stable mentoring relationship. For a foster child, a mentor is a non-parental figure, often an adult, who serves as a role model to provide advice and support.

Foster children often suffer maltreatment, abandonment and trauma making them more susceptible to behavioral, emotional, social and academic problems (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Emotional and behavioral problems do not always arise from genetic defects or biological pathology, but are instead often environmentally rooted. Foster youth experience high levels of transition with multiple social workers, placements, and schools; this inconsistency only results in mental instability. Encouragement, motivation, support and guidance are intangible assets that foster youth are often denied, nevertheless, imperative to their success and well-being. A mentor is someone who can support the foster youth as they develop coping, survival and life skills.

A number of researchers have reported that foster youth who have mentors exhibit fewer behavioral problems, more positive attitudes towards school, improved social skills and less drug experimentation (Southwick, Morgan, Vythilingam, & Charney, 2005). In one study, a team of researchers used data from the National Longitudinal Study of Adolescent Health to determine the impact of mentoring programs on youth in foster care. Of the 310 foster youth who took part in this study, 160 received mentors and 150 were placed in the non-mentored control group (Ahrens, DuBois, Richardson, Fan, & Lozano, 2008). The researchers found that foster youth with mentoring relationships had significantly more favorable outcomes than their non-mentored counterparts. The mentored foster youth demonstrated less physical aggression, increased attendance at school, higher self-esteem and required less disciplinary action at both home and school (Ahrens, et al., 2008).

Mentoring programs not only prove beneficial for foster youth, but can also relieve some of the pressures on foster parents and social workers. With mentored foster youth making better choices and requiring less disciplinary action, foster parents and social workers are more able to concentrate on long-term solutions and outcomes for the youth, rather than spend time addressing a troubled youth's daily needs. Mentoring programs also promote personal growth, professional development, increased self-confidence and self-esteem, as well as encourage a commitment to civic responsibility because of lessons and behaviors learned by both the mentor and mentee (Tausig, Culhane, Raviv, Fitzpatrick, & Hodas, 2010). Mentoring programs will not eliminate the difficult circumstances of youth in foster care; however, high-quality mentoring can have an enormous positive impact.

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The problem is that in a world of limited budgets and a declining economy it may appear that federally funded mentoring programs for foster youth are expensive and not sustainable. Senator Mary Landrieu introduced S.420, the Foster Care Mentoring Act of 2011; this bill has not yet passed. The purpose of the bill is to support the establishment or expansion and operation of programs using a network of public and private community entities to provide mentoring for children in foster care. The cost of the bill would amount to less than \$20 million annually (Landrieu introduces foster care mentoring act, 2011). In FY 2010 Congress appropriated \$27.7 billion to fund the United States' prison systems and for FY 2011 appropriations increased by almost \$2 billion (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). It is known that investing in mentoring programs for foster youth will reduce incarceration rates, and in return save money. Youth who go on to complete school, obtain jobs and become productive members of society will need fewer government services. Most importantly, their success contributes to breaking the cycle of abuse and neglect.

Knowing what we know about the outcomes for youth in care, it makes good policy sense to make an investment by providing foster youth with stable, caring mentors who are trained and capable of building a long-term relationship and assisting foster youth in becoming outstanding members of society. There is an abundance of research available proving the positive impact mentoring relationships have on foster youth. There is a critical need for policies, such as Senator Landrieu's Foster Care Mentoring Act, to create and fund intervention programs to ensure that our country's most vulnerable citizens are afforded the best opportunities for success. Congress should understand that mentoring programs for foster youth are a long term investment, not a short term expense.

To increase mentoring program for foster youth, policymakers should:

- Offer institutions of higher education a tax incentive to incorporate mentoring as part of their curriculum within specific disciplines that focus on youth interaction, for example, Schools of Social Work, Education, Psychology, Sociology, Medicine and Nursing. Service learning is a growing phenomenon, and many universities encourage faculty to incorporate service learning into classes (Wilkinson, 2002). For their participation, the universities would receive a ten to twenty percent tax incentive for the number of hours their students spent mentoring.
- As part of the national health reform, \$7 billion prevention and public health fund was used to encourage workers to engage in preventive care and wellness (Meyers, 2010). A similar concept could be used to encourage more companies and their employees to serve as mentors. More specifically, employees could receive incentives for hours spent mentoring foster youth. Another option to promote work place community service would be to allow employees to convert sick or paid time off to engage in community service. For example, many companies offer more sick time than employees use, therefore either requiring employees to lose the hours or roll the hours over to the next year. Employees would have an option of converting those hours to community service hours and have mentoring foster youth be one of the qualified forms of service.

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- Although youth mentoring programs have grown in popularity recently there is still a shortage of individuals willing to volunteer. One factor contributing to the shortage of volunteers is the time commitment required. Research shows that mentoring relationships lasting less than one year have the potential for negative outcomes (Ahrens et al. 2008). Because of the harm that short-term relationships may cause foster youth, it is imperative the relationships last at least one year with the hopes of it lasting a life-time. To encourage longevity, Senator Landrieu's Mentoring Act appropriated funds to offer incentives to volunteers, such as tuition forgiveness and professional development assistance. Another way to encourage volunteers to make the long-term commitment is to allow individuals to deduct the determined value of the hours spent mentoring from their federal income tax liability. To ensure volunteers are fulfilling their commitment, they would be required to submit a report from the foster care organization detailing hours spent mentoring foster youth.
- Group mentoring is a viable option to balance the uneven ratio of mentors to mentees. For instance, married couples could mentor co-ed foster youth in a group setting. This type of mentoring would influence the youth's communication skills and help them learn what a healthy, respectable relationship entails, while reducing the costs associated with operating mentoring programs.
- More should be done to develop foster youth alumni as a potential resource for mentors, as these individuals know firsthand the obstacles and struggles facing foster youth. In one New York study, the researcher found that foster youth reported a greater sense of hope and less feelings of isolation when mentored by adults who had "made it" through similar experiences to their own (Yancey, 1998).

SAVE A LIFE: Early Childhood Education and Foster Youth

By Kadidjia Adula

“There are only two lasting bequests we can hope to give our children. One is roots, the other, wings.”
-Hodding Carter

By introducing education and educational interventions as early as possible to the lives of foster children, we can give them stable educational beginnings – providing them roots – and from these roots they can grow wings to soar to proficiency in all their future endeavors.

Please take a moment to think about your life without your parents, or a moment without your child or siblings. How does that thought make you feel? I imagine that this thought is upsetting to you. If life truly separated you from your parents, siblings or child, there are additional questions you need to consider: What do you do? Who do you trust? You are confused and hurt. This is what the thousands of children in the foster care system have to deal with.

A Tale of Two Toddlers

I will begin by walking you through the lives of two toddlers: Sara and Leila. Sara comes from an intact middle class family. Her mother had adequate prenatal care; Leila is born to a single mother who did not have prenatal care. Sara’s parents have steady careers, stable housing, and she is provided with nourishing meals and snacks. Leila’s mother receives public assistance and struggles to provide for her, and there are times when Leila is not fed for extended portions of the day. She and her mother have unstable living arrangements – they move to varying shelters and sometimes sleep in streets. Sara is provided with healthcare and access to a primary care doctor. Leila on the other hand suffers from cystic fibrosis, but does not have access to a healthcare provider.

When they reach the age of two years old, medical researchers will tell you that Sara and Leila should have the same amount of brain development, but due to the environments they have grown up in this is not the case. Sara now attends the preschool her parents selected with exceptional care givers and educational guidance, whereas Leila has been removed from her home due to her mother’s unstable and sometimes neglectful patterns, placed in a foster home with three other children and does not attend daycare or early education classes due to her social worker’s lack of awareness that these services are available to her. In addition, Leila’s separation experience has been deeply traumatic and she now suffers from anxiety and Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Sara has been talked to and read to and has formed healthy attachment patterns with both her parents from her earliest days. In contrast, Leila on the other hand has not been read to and has formed an ambivalent attachment pattern. As she grows up in a foster home with many young children, Leila lacks parental engagement, has no access to the educational advantage that good preschools with well trained caregivers provide, and she continues to fall behind academically. The child welfare agency charged with oversight of her care does not pay attention to her special needs or educational gap.

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By the time Leila turns four years old, she has been in foster care for two years and has moved through three different placements. Sara has been in a stable home since birth. She is well socialized and confident, and she loves new experiences and learning. When the girls have reached the first grade, Leila is showing signs of significant developmental and cognitive delays, and her teacher is concerned by the fact that she is not reading at grade level so she enrolls her in special education, like many of her peers in foster care. Leila is now headed down a path of educational struggle that few foster youth overcome. These two girls have the same brain, but because of the differences in their early life experiences, they have drastically different brain development that affects their long-term educational performance. Without major interventions to overcome her current cognitive and educational deficiencies, Leila's inability to perform at grade level will persist and worsen throughout her stay in foster care.

Early Brain Development and Early Childhood Education Is Important to Every Child

"Early educational experiences determine whether a child's brain architecture will provide a strong or weak foundation for all future learning" (Kupcha-Szrom, 2011). In any discussion of early childhood education, it is first important to understand how the human brain develops. Children are born with a specific number of neurons (nerve cells) in their brain. Brain development occurs as messages are transmitted between neurons through what are known as the brain's synapses (Hawley & Gunner, 2000). After birth most parts of the brain do not form new neurons. While new synapses do form throughout life, the vast majority of synapse regeneration occurs in infancy and early childhood.

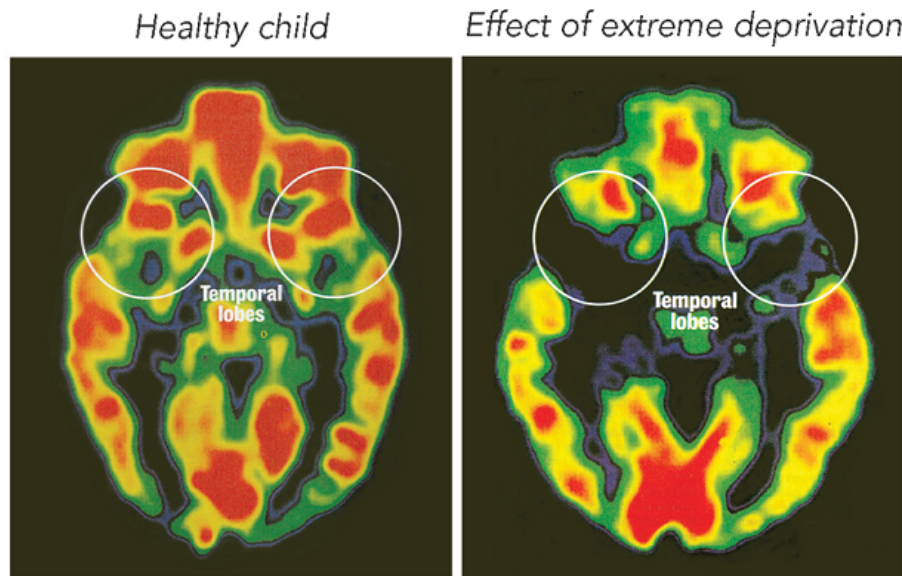
In their Starting Smart publication, Zero to Three and The Ounce of Prevention Fund explain how the primary stage of synapse formation occurs from birth to eight months using a pruning analogy:

"Pruning [of synapses] allows the brain to keep the connections that have a purpose, while eliminating those that aren't doing anything. In short, pruning increases the efficiency with which the brain can do what it needs to do. But, because the brain operates on the "use it or lose it" rule, an "over-pruning" of these connections can occur when a child is deprived of normally expected experiences in their early years. This leaves the child struggling to do what would have come more naturally otherwise" (Hawley & Gunner, 2000).

Most of the critical development in the brain occurs during a child's earliest years. "By three years of age the brain has reached 90% of adult size, whereas the body is still only about 18% of adult size. Childhood experiences define the adult by shaping the developing brain." (Perry & Pollard, 1998). Research also indicates that after this age, catching up on brain development is very difficult. This makes early education efforts for all children important for any child because after five, language learning abilities begin to slow and even close down.

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PET Scan of Brain Activities (90% of brain development occurs during 1st five years)



Source: Newsweek Special Edition, 1997

But it is important to recognize that the environment of a child also influences the development of cognitive processes – and this early development is the building block for all future learning. Harvard brain researchers have determined that certain environmental “effectiveness factors” enhance development in the first five years of life. These include such factors as language rich environments, safe physical settings, warm and responsive interactions with adults, and parent involvement in activities that encourage child participation (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2007). Experts state that more than any other factor, socio-economic status determines the ability to communicate and continue to learn at age and grade levels” (Kupcha-Szrom, 2011). “Research shows that a young child’s ability to use language... is related to later achievement in reading, writing and spelling. Studies also show that children from low-income families are both spoken to and read to less frequently than their middle class peers, which hinders their ability to develop literacy and language skills. This leads to the widening achievement gap or ‘language gap’” (Kupcha-Szrom, 2011).

The Value of Brain Development and Early Childhood Education for Society

Researchers at Harvard’s Center on the Developing Child highlight the fact that policies that are supportive of parents and that adults that provide early care and education for children in “stable and stimulating environments” help establish a “sturdy foundation for later school achievement, economic productivity, and responsible citizenship.” (Harvard Center on the Developing Child, 2007). But we do not need researchers for such common sense principles. Valuing early brain development and education of children starts them on the path of educational productivity so they enjoy learning and educational activities and can thrive in school. Ultimately these children can identify and achieve their own future goals, including attending college or vocational training, being financially independent

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and non-reliant on public assistance, and prospering in order to later give back to the communities that have helped them succeed. Most importantly, early brain development and education of children substantially decreases the chances that they will follow destructive life paths such as incarceration, drug use, and homelessness.

Federal Programs Addressing Child Development and Education

This brain development research and the increased need for early childhood education among children in low income households has long been recognized by Congress and thus employed in the legislating of several federal programs that are geared toward meeting the needs of children from low economic statuses. Such programs include Women, Infants and Children program, which provides funds for low income women to receive nutritious supplemental foods for their children that encourage positive brain development; Early Head Start focuses on providing cognitive and language development for children ages zero to three in low income families; Head Start does the same for children ages three to five who are not eligible for kindergarten; and the Infants and Toddlers Program and Preschool Program under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act that focus services on children with developmental delays related to mental and physical capacities in their families (Lynch & McCallion, 2011).

These many programs serve underprivileged children of families who are at-risk for developmental and educational delays. The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that in 2009 there were 21,299,656 children in the nation under five years of age. In the the 2009-2010 program year Early Head Start served 133,879 children and Head Start served 983,809. While not all the children in the nation need these programs, the numbers of children served through Head Start and Early Head Start do not encompass the many additional children who are still developmentally and educationally behind. What we do know is that these programs have identified strategic ways to intervene in and encourage young children's brain development, literacy and early education. They do so by targeting and improving the overall environment of a child, and their language and literacy capabilities.

Brain Development, Education, and Foster Children

Brain development and early childhood learning such as language development and literacy are critical for every child – including children in the foster care system. But foster children who enter care at young ages are more likely to face challenges in both achieving full development and performing at grade level both early and later in life because of the multiple challenges they face.

Current discussions of the intersection of foster care and education are often geared toward older youth, educational instability, and aging out, as well as attempting to encourage higher education for foster youth. Yet annually only 3% of alumni of foster care complete bachelor's degrees (Casey Family Programs, 2007). The CHAFEE Educational and Training Voucher (ETV) Program is the most well known program dedicated to education specifically for older children in and aging out of care. While it is important that this program is in place for higher educational support, no programs exist specifi-

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cally to support the educational needs of younger children in foster care. Unfortunately, by delaying educational supports until this later time educational programs for higher education support become more like a bandage than a solution for educational success, and many younger foster children who continue to struggle in their academic settings end up veering away from educational paths. This academic gap is common in the lives of many foster youth. “As a group, foster kids test far behind their peers, are more likely to drop out, repeat grades, be in special-ed[ucation] classes, and be suspended or expelled” (Paulson, 2005). To close this gap, programs and funding need to be allocated to assessments of the educational abilities of foster children and interventions as soon these assessments identify developmental delays.

As stated above, certain “effectiveness factors” can enhance brain and cognitive development in the first five years of a child’s life. Yet these effectiveness factors are frequently lacking or stunted in the lives of foster children. One factor that is important for educational development is a stable and safe living arrangement. Yet it is common knowledge that children who have recently entered foster care come from unstable living situations – often neglect or abuse - and also that our current child welfare system frequently bounces the children within its care from placement to placement, further damaging a child’s sense of stability. According to the Child and Adolescent Psychiatric Clinics of North America “the brain’s exquisite sensitivities to experience in early childhood allows traumatic experiences during infancy and childhood to impact all future emotional, behavioral, cognitive, social and physiologic functions” (Perry & Pollard, 1998). Sadly, this trauma is commonplace for many children who enter foster care.

Another effectiveness factor is warm and supportive adults. Children in foster care encounter many new adults upon entering care. These include caseworkers, judges, foster parents, teachers and doctors. Yet these adults are often not aware of or sensitive to the level of warm and supportive care these same children who have often suffered abuse or neglect need – in comparison to heavy workloads and busy schedules – in order to overcome the trauma they have experienced. Accordingly, parenting and professional training for adults that interact with foster children should encourage techniques that promote providing greater warmth and supportiveness as a basic need for these children’s restoration.

One additional effectiveness factor is parent involvement in activities with child participation. These activities include speaking and reading to as well as playing games with the child to stimulate learning. But we know that socioeconomic status is a major factor in parent involvement in these activities. The lower a family’s income is, the less likely that these activities are occurring. Statistically, we know that compared to other families, foster parents tend to have lower incomes and less education (O’Hare, 2008), thus children in foster homes are less likely to have parent involvement in these critical activities.

As you can see, children in foster care show a great propensity toward the risk factors that cause developmental and educational delays in contrast to their counterparts in the general public. Thus, they are more likely to need educational supports and interventions.

Community School Model

An example of how a community school model can serve children in foster care and provide educational supports they might not otherwise receive is Molly Stark Elementary School in Bennington, Vermont. This full service community school exemplifies the spirit of community involvement which is ideal for children in foster care in need of educational and relational support. People of all ages, backgrounds and experiences learn and work together as neighbors to improve student learning. Holistic support for students include “on site pediatric, psychological, dental, pre-school, outreach, nutrition, counseling, after school and summer school programs and these level the playing field for all students.” Caring staff “nurture, challenge and celebrate the minds of all students, no matter where they are on the learning continuum.” The school fosters a family atmosphere to welcome everyone as active participants in the educational process.

The Crossover Between Foster Care and Early Childhood Learning Initiatives

Congress has recognized that children in foster care are at greater risk for educational delays and brain development challenges early in life. As such, whereas children who enroll in federal Head Start and Early Head Start Programs must qualify for the program based on the low income status of their family, children in foster care automatically qualify regardless of family income (45 CFR § 1305.2 (l)). But only 3% of children served by these programs (29,514 of 983,809 in Head Start, and 4016 of 133,879 in Early Head Start) qualify exclusively due to being in foster care (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2005). AFCARS data shows that of the 408,425 children currently in foster care, 108,729, or 26.6%, are ages zero to three, and 41,212 or 9.9%, are ages four to five (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). HHS data estimates that the rate of children entering federal early childhood intervention programs is ten times the rate of that of the general population. In further support of foster children’s need for early interventions, in 2003 Congress amended the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act to require mandatory referrals for children who entered the care of state child welfare agencies under the age of three due to abuse and neglect (Center for Law and Social Policy, 2005). Thus, research and federal legislation are in place to support the unique early educational intervention needs of foster youth. But it is important that federal, state and private child welfare agencies work together to ensure that all foster children are truly receiving these services and that none fall through the cracks. Each individual foster child who does not receive the educational support and stability that will allow him or her to prosper as productive citizen is one too many.

Solutions

Early childhood education for foster youth is the foundation for successful life outcomes for foster youth, who often need continuing educational support beyond early childhood. But providing educational interventions as soon as possible is crucial to positive outcomes in the lives of foster youth. With this in mind,

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1. Congress should enforce its mandate for automatic referral of children who enter foster care through abuse or neglect under the Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act into early intervention programs by requiring that state child welfare agencies contact foster parents and local intervention programs to confirm that the child has indeed been enrolled. Further, Congress should also require that child welfare agencies notify the foster parents of those children that are not automatically referred to early intervention programs due to abuse or neglect of the eligibility of all foster children to qualify for these services.
2. Congress should hold state child welfare agencies accountable for the foster children under the age of five that are not receiving early interventions that an assessment later shows they should have been receiving upon entry into foster care, since foster children are known to face significant developmental difficulties due to early trauma.
3. Congress should dedicate funds to a pilot program for foster parent and foster child early childhood education programs as well as dedicate curriculum to foster parent trainings on early childhood education.
4. Congress should fund individual charter schools dedicated entirely to early childhood and preschool education of foster children in the ten cities in the nation with the largest foster care populations. Staff will be highly trained in trauma response and the unique needs of children in foster care to provide the most educational stability possible. This pilot program should include a rigorous data tracking and assessment component that will direct future early educational intervention efforts for all foster children.
5. Congress should amend S.616, the Supporting Community Schools Act, to include educational support for foster youth within the services it provides. Through this community school model foster children could receive the tutoring and mentoring services they need to thrive academically as well as be exposed to potentially greater educational opportunities than they would otherwise.
6. Congress should draft legislation similar to S.571, The Educational Success for Children Without Homes Act of 2011, which provides grants to states, and subgrants to local education agencies, for the education of homeless youth that accomplishes the goals of immediate enrollment in school and coordination of services for foster children in need of educational support.

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Awareness and Recruitment; Screening and Training A Chance to Change a Life

By Jessie Peterson

There is little awareness in the general public about the foster care system, the youth who are a part of it, and most importantly the ways in which an individual wanting to make a difference can become part of it (Family Support America, 2005). Despite this reality, not much is being done to increase awareness in the community and there is not enough of a focus on recruitment of quality foster parents. Consequently, few people step up to become foster parents, which leads to limited choice for placements. Too often those who do choose to become foster parents do so for the wrong reasons. More people in the general public need to understand who foster children are and what it is that they need. This will ensure resources exist in order to build a child welfare system that is effectively creating and maintaining safe, stable, and loving homes for foster youth exists. To achieve this goal, the federal government must take three critical steps: increase recruitment of quality foster parents; effectively screen out individuals who cannot meet the needs of youth in care; and extensively train and provide ongoing support for foster parents.

Awareness and Recruitment

There are over 408,000 children in the United States foster care system but only 180,000 licensed foster homes and group homes (AFCARS, 2011; Child Welfare League of America, 2005). The problem is that the general public is unaware of this population of children or they have misconceptions that lead them to believe all youth in foster care are juvenile delinquents (National Foster Care Adoption Attitudes Survey, 2007). This lack of information leads to a lower number of families getting involved in the foster care system.

While raising awareness about the need for foster parents, attention must be paid to the types of communities from which foster parents are being recruited from. According to a study in the USA Today, *Big Gaps in Foster Comes vs. Traditional Homes*, “Children in foster care live in poorer, more crowded and less educated homes than kids in other families, often taking them from one disadvantaged environment into another” (2008). One study using census data found that foster households are to be low-income, more likely to have a severe housing financial burden, to have at least one parent who did not complete high school, and to have a parent who did not work the previous year (O’Hare, 2008).

Recruitment efforts should instead focus on groups of individuals who are more likely to become quality foster parents, such as those in helping professions, faith-based communities, members of the military, and currently involved parents, such as parents at a PTA meeting.

To address the issue of an overall shortage of foster homes and the lack of quality homes, policymakers should consider the following:

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- Older foster youth are more at risk for lacking a foster home placement and are usually forced into group homes (Courtney, 2005). To ensure effective recruitment programs exist for those who are in danger of not finding a family, best practices in recruitment need to be followed, such as using natural connections in a youth's life, data mining to find past connections in a youth's file, or positive messaging in advertisements to ensure the right points are being communicated to the public. For example, a child's phone contacts, facebook friends, and responses from the youth to the question, "who do you turn to when you need help?" can lead to possible placements.
- A portion of the funding that is given to programs in states should be put towards effective recruitment activities, advertisement, and awareness campaigns.
- Each child welfare agency must appoint a recruitment coordinator who will ensure targeted recruitment for quality foster parents is being done, as well as will mobilize community efforts on this issue. More involvement of private organizations and agencies, and better collaboration is needed in recruitment strategies that are already in place. Bringing together volunteers and community groups, public and private businesses, government agencies, churches and faith-based organizations, and individuals that are already working on recruitment will make an impact.
- Those who have experienced being in and a part of the foster care system, whether by being a foster youth, working for the child welfare system, or being a foster parent, should inform others about the experiences of being in foster care and how to change the system for the better. Celebrities and other prominent individuals should also be encouraged to raise awareness. One example of this is Congresswoman Michele Bachmann, who has had 23 foster children and voices this regularly. Even if people do not know what foster care is, expressing it will lead to people researching, asking questions, and wanting to know more. In addition, former foster youth should be given the opportunities to speak up and speak out on their own personal experiences.
- A study needs to be funded that examines what characteristics make quality foster parents. To date, no research exists which inhibits successful recruitment. This data can be used when advertising qualities, abilities, and traits in foster parents.

Screening

Screening potential foster parents is a current problem in the foster care system because there is a need to not be stringent to the point where foster parents are discouraged from becoming parents, versus the need to not be too lenient and accept poor foster parents into the system. The screening that is required before being accepted as foster parents should be an effective measure of seeing if a potential foster parent is able to properly care for a youth.

Currently, people who are looking to become foster parents have to go through a screening process that involves interviews, criminal checks, home safety inspections, physical examinations, varied hours of training, and more. These requirements range from state to state (Dodge County Human

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“ My mother changed my life. Without her, I would not be the person I am today. It only takes one individual to make a positive influence in a child’s life. Recruitment for parents, like my mom, is essential. ”

-Jessie Peterson and her (non-biological) mother, Patricia Lopez.

Services and Health Department, 2010; County of Santa Clarita, Social Services Agency, 2011; Family for Kids, 2004). However, there is no information about how to screen personalities traits or other characteristics.

Poor foster parents fail to provide a loving and nurturing environment that not only all children need, but especially children in foster care who have experienced trauma. Unfortunately, not all foster parents are motivated by the right reasons. Some are interested in the financial benefit, or while others use their foster children for domestic work. These conditions are sometimes combined with the presence of reabuse abuse of children by their foster parents. For example, during a Baltimore lawsuit, surveys were conducted about child abuse in foster care, “Trudy Festinger, head of the Department of Research at the New York University School of Social Work, determined that over 28% of the children in state care had been abused while in the system. [...] The most troubling result of the Kansas City review was the level of abuse, undetected or unreported, in foster homes, 25% of the children in the sample were the subject of abuse or inappropriate punishment, and 88% of those reports were not properly investigated.” (Toma, 2005). There are suspected to be many other cases where abuse and neglect while in foster care are not reported.

To improve the screening process for foster parents, policymakers should consider the following:

- Research must be conducted that studies different screening methods and determines how to evaluate motives, how to test how parents will handle the stresses of parenting a child in foster care, and that raises indicators for reabuse in foster care.
- Each foster parent should be given the same monthly maintenance payment, regardless of behavioral, mental or physical health needs. If a youth needs more services, this is where the money needs to be invested. More resources, such as individual therapy, tutoring, parenting classes, family counseling, wraparound services, a behavior coach, or other services should be made available, however, not as direct funds to foster parents. This will in part remove the financial incentive for becoming a foster parent (Department and Family Services, 2009; Texas Health and Family and Protective Services, 2009).
- Monthly maintenance payments should be in the form of a debit card to allow social workers

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to monitor where money is spent to ensure the foster children are benefitting from the funds available to them for clothes, food, and other necessities.

Training

Once foster parents are screened and become licensed, they go through training before a child is placed in their home. There is currently no universal standard for curriculum or number of training hours to ensure all foster parents receive the information necessary to be quality foster parents. States require that foster parents take a certain number of classroom hours that are supposed to teach them how to be good foster parents. The National Resource Center for Family Centered Practice and Permanency Planning at the Hunter College School provides a chart that shows hours needed to complete before becoming a foster parent; these range anywhere from six to forty-five (Hunter College School of Social Work, 2008).

An organization in New York, You Gotta Believe, has training orientations for foster parents every week at different locations and times so that they can be flexible with the schedules and different circumstances of foster parents. The classes are taught by former foster youth (You Gotta Believe, n.d.). Former foster youth who have been through the system are the best to train foster parents about how to care for youth currently in the system. They have been through many of the circumstances that current foster children will be facing and know how to deal with them. Another example of involving youth in the training process is the California Youth Connection, a statewide organization that does advocacy work for foster care in the state of California. The California Youth Connection is currently working on a video made by current and former foster youth for foster parents, the social workers and the staff members of group homes about how to treat foster youth and handle tough situations regarding the youth.

To improve the training standards for foster parents, policymakers should consider the following:

- Training programs must be evaluated to ensure they are effective in preparing foster parents to become quality foster parents. Curriculum must be evaluated, as well as parents should report on how prepared they were by the training at different time intervals during their foster parenting. Responses from foster parents need to be taken into consideration when revising the curriculum for future trainings (Chestnutt, 2008).
- Former foster youth should be included in foster parent training programs. Former youth know the feelings, experiences, and needs of children in foster care better than any professional. Involving them in training helps educate foster parents of the specific issues and causes, and prepares them for situations that may arise with their own foster children.

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Support and Accountability

Support and accountability should not stop when the parent training is complete. Once youth are placed into foster homes, there is a need for ongoing support for foster parents and accountability to make sure that they are properly caring for the foster children in their homes. One survey showed that 40% of all foster parents stop fostering after the first two years in part because they lack support in the form of ongoing training and support groups (Wisconsin Foster Parent Retention & Support Subcommittee, n.d.). There should be more checking in on foster parents and youth once foster youth have been placed into the home. In this way, social workers can track the foster parents and children more effectively to ensure that it is a safe and nurturing home.

To address the issue of lack of support and accountability for foster parents, policymakers should:

- Provide ongoing support in the form of foster parent support groups after children are placed into the foster home. There is a lack of support available to foster parents to ensure quality foster parents remain in the system and do not quit, or that they are continually being shown better ways to foster parent as they are learning through the process.
- Social workers should make random visits to foster homes to check on youth. These visits should not only include a sit down with the whole family, the social worker should do a one-on-one visit with the youth. This can prevent fear of telling of abuse or neglect from the foster parents. When children are being abused or neglected they are too scared to say it in front of the foster parents.

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Giving a Voice to Foster Children and Youth in Court Proceedings

By Amy Peters

Most children who enter the foster care system have experienced a life of abuse, neglect, or abandonment by parents or caregivers - those of whom they should be most able to rely on. Then, they are suddenly and unexpectedly removed from everything that is familiar to them. They are given a new life in a new home, often with a new school in a new neighborhood. Many important and life changing decisions about the child's life are made in a courtroom, such as whether the child will remain in his or her home, the nature and duration of any placements outside the home, the child's contact with family and relatives, and the access the child receives to social services.

The dependency court system was designed to protect these children from future loss and abuse, to ensure their safety and well-being, and to reunite them with family or another permanent place to call home (Taylor, 2009). Unfortunately, the level to which these children and youth are involved in their court hearings as well as the amount and quality of legal representation they receive is often both inconsistent and inadequate. In all but seventeen states, children and youth in the foster care system are deprived of the basic right to an attorney – even though this right is granted to their delinquent counterparts in the juvenile justice system. Furthermore, many of these youth are not considered a party in their own case or given the option to attend their own court hearings.

Children and youth in the foster care system should not be rendered voiceless or without input in the legal proceedings that determine the course of their life. The dependency court system and its procedures should be reformed to allow for meaningful participation of foster children in their own hearings as well as provide them with adequate legal representation.

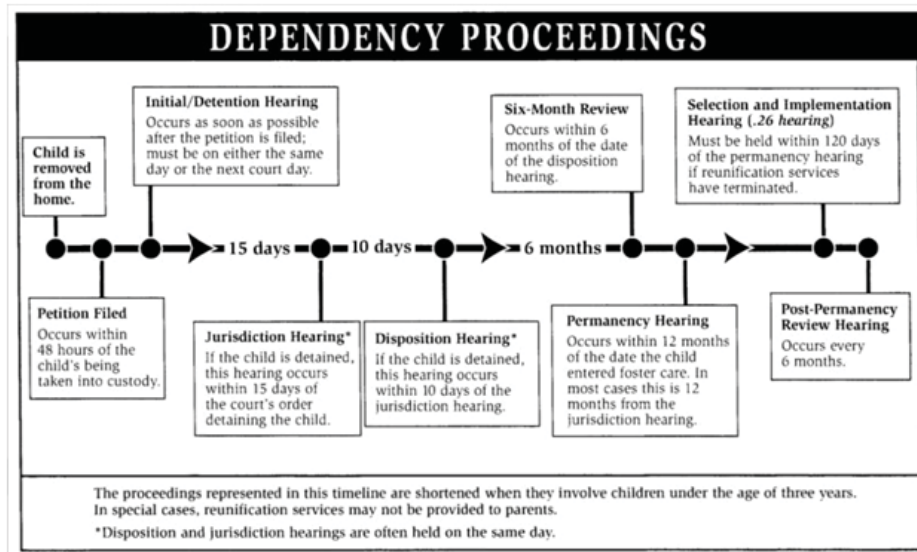
A Background of Dependency Court Process

A brief description of the dependency court process may prove useful in establishing the importance of youth involvement in it. Generally, a case begins with a report of suspected child maltreatment from a teacher, neighbor, or other mandatory reporter. Shortly after this report, an investigation by child protection workers, law enforcement, or both is conducted to determine what actions, if any, should be taken. When an investigation reveals that the child's safety may be in jeopardy, the investigating social worker will request that the child be removed from the home.

Dependency courts become involved when a petition is submitted for the removal of the child from the home. Hearings are held at the beginning of the case to inform parents or caregivers of their rights as well as to determine that the legal requirements have indeed been met for the child's removal. Following this determination, a dispositional hearing is held to ascertain the best interests of the child as well as ensure that rehabilitative plans have been put in place for the parents or caregivers in an effort toward reunifying the family. Under the Adoption and Safe Families Act, federal law requires that the child's case be reviewed by the court every six months from the date of the dispositional hearing throughout the course of the child's case in the dependency court process (Weisz, Wingrove, Beal, & Faith-Slaker, 2011).

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Outline of Dependency Court Process



Outline of the Dependency Court Process

Source: Families for Children, *Our Children are Our Future*, 2008.

Note: This is a sample timeline of dependency proceedings for some states. The Adoption and Safe Families Act does not indicate the number of days within which a hearing must be implemented for the detention and jurisdiction hearing. The Act only requires that the review hearings occur every six months.

The Impact of the Dependency Court System on Children and Youth

Every year, approximately 3.3 million child abuse reports and allegations are made involving an estimated 6 million children (Childhelp, 2010). Of these, the latest Adoption and Foster Care Analysis and Reporting System (AFCARS) data reports that 408,425 children were placed into the foster care system, 64,084 of whom had their ties to parents legally severed (Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Furthermore, an estimated 70% of children who enter the dependency system end up in long term foster care until they are emancipated (Frederick, 2007). This means that the majority of children who enter the dependency court system will spend most of their childhood in and out of court proceedings that determine the courses of action that are in their best interests.

Unfortunately, the level of youth involvement as well as legal representation in court proceedings for children and youth in foster care varies from state to state, county to county, and often hearing to hearing. Whether or not the child is informed of court hearings or given the option to attend the proceedings is usually decided on a case by case basis. In many states the child is not even considered a party to the case and only seventeen states provide client directed legal representation for children and youth in dependency court proceedings (Frederick, 2007).

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“You are the one who makes the decisions, [but] I need to be heard so people may understand how I feel or what I need...Listen to me, since no one else will, and try to understand where I’m coming from.”

The Need for Meaningful Participation of Foster Youth in the Court Process

It is crucial that the dependency court system does not dismiss the voices of those it is charged with protecting. While these clients may be children, they nonetheless desire to be heard and given a role in decisions made about their lives. The involvement of children and youth in court proceedings is often uniquely informational for the judge, attorneys and other parties. To effectively make decisions the court needs to be aware of the child’s position. In 2006, Congress emphasized this point when it enacted the Child and Families Improvement Act. This act requires courts to consider the child’s view on his permanency or transition plan during the hearing (Taylor, 2009).

Furthermore, research has shown that children who attend their own dependency court proceedings are more likely to feel as if they have a full understanding of their case. Also, they were more likely to feel that their guardians ad litem and caseworkers are doing a good job (Weisz et al., 2011).

Developmental research has shown that children even as young as those in the first grade are able to evaluate fairness and will hold a more positive perspective of decisions they believe were made in fairness (Taylor, 2009). Children who feel that they have been given the opportunity to meaningfully participate in the court process are more likely to believe that they have been treated fairly; thus, they are more likely to respect the decisions that are made and abide by the court’s order. Including children and youth in their court hearings also empowers, even if the ultimate decision is not the one they had hoped for. As one youth put it, “You are the one who makes the decisions, [but] I need to be heard so people may understand how I feel or what I need...Listen to me, since no one else will, and try to understand where I’m coming from.” (Taylor, 2009).

Despite the many benefits of involving foster children in their own court proceedings, there are those who oppose their involvement. One argument against youth participation in court proceedings is that the child or youth may not know how to properly behave in a courtroom. But a study conducted by the University of Nebraska Center for Children, Families and the Law that involved 93 children ranging in age from eight to eighteen showed that these children were generally attentive and not disruptive during their court hearings. Yet another argument is that involvement in court could be too traumatic for the child, and numerous critics express concern that children may be harmed by exposure to painful information or being forced to talk about sensitive matters. However, in this same study no amount of harm or trauma resulted from the child attending his or her own court hearings, regardless of the age of the children studied (Weisz et al., 2011).

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To further protect the child from any harm he or she might endure as a result of being present at court proceedings, the American Bar Association (ABA) recommends that the child can be excluded from certain parts of the hearing in which sensitive evidence might be presented, rather than excluding the child from the entire hearing. The ABA stresses that if a decision to exclude the child from the hearing is to be made, it should be on the basis that the child does not want to attend, is too young to sit through the hearing, or would be better served by nonattendance. The ABA goes on to state that even a child who is assumed to be too young to sit through the hearing may benefit from seeing the courtroom and the judge who will be making the decisions (ABA, 1996).

The Need for Adequate Legal Representation for Foster Youth

In 1974, Congress passed the Child Abuse and Neglect Prevention and Treatment Act (CAPTA) which conditioned states' eligibility for federal grants on meeting certain requirements. One of these requirements mandated that states appoint a guardian ad litem (GAL) to any child who is the subject of abuse and neglect. The reality is that GAL roles and qualifications differ amongst the fifty states. However, all GALs have the duty to represent the child's best interests in court proceedings. Over time, Congress provided a little more direction by amending the law to specify that a GAL may be an attorney and that the GAL must receive training appropriate to the role (Taylor, 2007).

Such minimal direction from CAPTA has allowed the states to broadly interpret the law and construct their own models of practice for representation of children in the dependency court process. Currently states use many different structures and legal philosophies as to how children and youth should be represented in court. These models distinguish an attorney, who represents the child's expressed wishes, from a GAL, who represents what is believed to be the child's best interests. The three main models of representation used by states are (1) the attorney GAL, (2) the volunteer GAL, and (3) client directed legal representation (possibly in addition to a GAL).

There are nineteen states that utilize the attorney GAL approach. While the attorney GAL is a licensed attorney, there is no client-attorney relationship that would allow for complete confidentiality and trust between the child and the attorney. In many of these states the attorney GAL is not under any legal obligation to inform the court of the child's position; when they do, the child's position may often be minimized (Taylor, 2009).

In other states, children and youth are represented in court by people who are not attorneys and have no legal background, such as a volunteer GAL or Court Appointed Special Advocate (CASA). While such persons may be beneficial to the child and court by advocating for his or her "best interests," the American Bar Association states that "...the nonlawyer guardian ad litem cannot and should not be expected to perform any legal functions on behalf of the child" (ABA, 1996). Thus, it is still necessary that the child have an attorney who can zealously advocate a position on behalf of the child.

While the right to an attorney is one of America's most basic civil legal privileges, only seventeen states require that a client directed attorney be appointed to children in dependency court proceedings (Frederick, 2007). In these states, the relationship between the attorney and the child is the same as

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any other client-attorney relationship, which involves a confidential relationship with privileged communications. In all the remaining states, children in the dependency court process do not receive the legal representation that would occur between an attorney and his client.

Many may suggest that granting children in dependency cases their own attorney can cause problems, particularly when the attorney may believe that the child's expressed wishes are wholly inappropriate or could pose a safety risk for the child. An example is if the child wishes to return home but the attorney does not believe that the home is a safe environment. However, if the lawyer has taken the time to establish rapport with the child, as in most client-attorney relationships, it is likely that the lawyer will be able to persuade the child to abandon a dangerous position or at least identify an alternate course of action. If the child cannot be persuaded, the lawyer in the client directed representation system is bound by the child's direction but has the duty to safeguard the child's interests by requesting the appointment of a GAL. This GAL who will be charged with advocating for the child's best interests. While the attorney should present the child's express wishes and ensure that the child's legal rights are protected (**Standards of Practice for Lawyers Who Represent Children in Abuse and Neglect Cases**, 1996).

Others may argue that the cost of appointing an attorney to every child involved in the dependency court process may prove to be too much of a financial burden for states. Total cost would vary by state depending on the number of children served and the amount of time spent on each case. This may seem like a legitimate concern for states. However, studies have shown that children and youth in the dependency court system are more likely to achieve permanency - such as adoption or successful reunification - if they have effective legal counsel. When children are permanently placed their cases are closed and monitoring by the child protection agency is minimized or ceases. In turn, the federal and state governments save approximately \$143,000 in child welfare costs, as well as an additional \$190,000 to \$235,000 in other savings in programs such as special education and the costs of potential future involvement in the justice system (Taylor, 2009). Thus, the cost of providing an attorney to children in dependency proceedings is offset by the positive impact of effective court advocacy on behalf of the child. Furthermore, children and youth who achieve permanency have better outcomes and are more successful than counterparts who age out of the foster care system, and the government is likely to receive greater tax revenues from these individuals over time.

Conclusion

Much is at stake for foster children who do not have a voice in their legal proceedings. "Denying [children] a voice... reinforces the lessons learned most thoroughly by abused and neglected children, that [they] should not expect to have any control over [their] fate." (Taylor, 2009) On the other hand, children in the dependency court process who have the opportunity for meaningful participation within a traditional, client directed model of representation would not only achieve better outcomes, but would be strongly empowered. In such a system, these children would recognize that their opinion is important.

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Recommendations

- Congress should require the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to collect from the relevant agency of each state information on the type and quality of legal representation that children in the dependency court process receive and the laws and regulations that pertain to this representation. Upon receiving this information, HHS should compile the results into a report for Congress.
- Congress should pass legislation requiring all states to recognize children in dependency court proceedings as a legal party to the case. As such, children will receive full legal remedies and be able to initiate and receive notice of all legal proceedings to which they are party.
- Congress should require all states to implement a client directed model of legal representation for all children in the dependency court process. States should be allowed no more than three years to fully comply with this implementation, and those that do not fully comply should be penalized by a reduction in federal child welfare funding.

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Preventing What is Preventable

By Marisela Ortiz

Foster care is intended to be a much-needed safety net for children who are victims of child maltreatment, however, more resources need to be directed towards keeping children in their families of origin and preventing the need for out of home care. Prevention programs that assist families in need have continuously demonstrated to be effective in decreasing the need for foster care placement. More information needs to be gathered on what constitutes a successful prevention program, thereby allowing effective programs to be implemented around the nation.

In 2009, there were 6 million cases reported to child protective authorities, 763,000 of which were confirmed as maltreatment (Finkelhor, Jones, & Shattuck, 2009). Of these substantiated cases of maltreatment, only 254,000 children were brought into foster care (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). What these numbers tell us is that the majority of families were provided with services so that the children could safely remain at home. Over 60 percent of the children who were ultimately removed, suffered from two main forms of maltreatment: poverty and parental substance abuse. In order to continue to eliminate the need for removal and serve children in their families, these two leading causes of out of home care must be addressed.

Causes of Maltreatment

The two leading causes for entry into the foster care system are poverty and substance abuse by a parent. Parental substance abuse was present in 29% of all cases that resulted in child removals in FY 2007 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009). Substance abuse results in a high cost to governments and society. Those costs which are direct include association with hospitalization, chronic health problems, health care, the child welfare system, and law enforcement. Other indirect costs are education, mental health, and juvenile delinquency (Wang & Holton, 2007). According to the publication Prevent Child Abuse America, it is estimated that child abuse and neglect costs \$94 billion dollars annually (Wang & Holton, 2007). By addressing substance abuse, the number of children who enter the foster care system will be reduced in addition to reducing the costs associated with substance abuse.

Another factor that is also a cause of child maltreatment is the effects of poverty on families. Children who lived in homes that have an annual income of or below \$15,000 were at a higher risk of maltreatment than those who lived in a home with an annual income of \$30,000 or more (US Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Parents who face poverty may lack essentials such as food, clothing, medical care, access to mental health treatment, or other necessary resources to promote healthy family functioning. This can result in a living environment that makes children more vulnerable.

Effective Prevention Programs

The Time to Reform: Investing in Prevention, Keeping Children Safe At Home reported that prevention programs that are effective are those that entail three specific program features, which are: an aim at

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the family experience rather than individual, sensitivity to culturally diverse populations, and a comprehensive approach that is community based. Programs must include services that will benefit the family as a whole. By doing this all issues can be identified that affect the entire family and not just one individual. Family efforts are vital because this can cause a bonding between the child and the parents, increasing the likelihood of preserving the family unit (Kenny & Bontrager, 2007). According to a report released by Casey Family Programs, programs that do focus on the family rather than individuals such as the Chicago's Child Parent Center's prevention programs are most effective (2011). This program focuses on economically disadvantaged families and emphasizes child development with parent participation. The programs have proven to significantly reduce repeat maltreatment and ultimately prevent foster care placement. This program had a great effect specifically on neglect, which is present in 54% of all cases that result in child removal (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2008).

Sensitivity to culturally diverse populations is necessary due to the disproportionate representation of minority children within the child welfare system. Minority children make up 60% of all children in the foster care system (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). The GAO attributed their overrepresentation in the foster care system to a lack of access to prevention services (Brown, 2008).

A comprehensive approach that leads to community involvement is important because families need to be connected with the informal and natural support system necessary to maintain a healthy family dynamic. By ensuring preventative programs that are used include these fundamental values, it can be assured that families are receiving a resource that will preserve and promote family functioning and prevent children from entering the foster care system.



Federal Funding for Prevention Programs

In 2001, there was an estimated 296,000 children who entered the foster system. That same year, Congress passed the Promoting Safe and Stable Families Act which increased funding for prevention programs. By 2010, the number of entries was significantly reduced to 254,000 children (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011). Federal funding to prevention programs has proven successful over the last decade in reducing entries into the foster care system.

Most of the funding that is utilized for programs that focus on prevention is disbursed through the Title IV-B funds, funneled through the Promoting Safe and Stable Families program. The program was autho-

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rized for funding at \$565 million in FY 2011, \$365 million of that was mandatory funds and \$200 million in discretionary funds (Spar, 2001). However, Title IV-E accounts for the majority (65%) of the \$8.2 billion federal funding (Radel, 2005). This means the majority of federal funding is directed towards services for children who are already in the foster care system, instead of funding preventative services.

To safely reduce the number of entries into foster care, policymakers should:

- Provide families with preventative programs that aim at reaching an array of substance abusers. There should not be an emphasis on one type of substance abuser, to assure that all are within the realm of services.
- Raise awareness about existing community resources meant to serve families in crisis or low-income families. These resources include access to food banks, utility bill help, or mental health services.
- Pass H.R. 1194 Renew the Authority of HHS to Approve Demonstration Projects in State Child Welfare Programs. This legislation would restore the waiver authority which would allow states greater flexibility in the amount of funding that goes towards developing innovative solutions such as preventative programs.
- Restructure the federal child welfare financing structure to promote serving children in families through prevention programs, instead of requiring states to bring children into foster care before they are eligible for federal funds to serve these families.

Taking Re-abuse Into Account

By Mitsu Klines

There are 408,000 children in the foster care system today. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Many of these children were removed from their biological family due to neglect and abuse. However, often times these children are being taken from abusive situations only to be placed in a foster home where they would be subject to “re-abuse”. According to the National Coalitions for Child Protection Reform, (NCCPR) in fiscal year 2006, “There were three times more physical abuse and two times more sexual abuse in foster homes than in the general population. The study also found that in group homes there were more than ten times the rate of physical abuse and more than 28 times the rate of sexual abuse as in the general population.” (National Coalitions for Child Protection Reform, 2011). For such high rates of abuse to be occurring in a system whose sole mission is to protect against child maltreatment is an outrage. The federal government should take decisive action to eliminate the abuse of children while in care. More specifically, the federal government should implement an accountability system that financially penalizes states for each instance of substantiated abuse of a child while in state care, provide for better training and support for social service providers, and more thorough screening and training for foster parents.

Abuse in the foster care system is a problem that too often goes unaddressed due to poor social service supports, poorly trained and equipped foster parents, and issues with holding states accountable for specific outcomes. According to a report by the Inspector General of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Missouri and Louisiana are two states with the highest rate of neglect and abuse in foster home placements. In Missouri, in 2001, a study conducted by the Children’s Defense Fund found that “57 percent of the sample children were placed in foster care settings that put them at the very least at a high risk of abuse or neglect.” (Department of Health and Human Services, Office of Inspector General; Improvements Needed in Monitoring Child Placing Agencies, 2001.). In Louisiana, a similar study by the Throwaway Children Institute found that “21 percent of abuse or neglect cases involved a foster home” (Improvements Needed in Monitoring Child Placing Agencies, 2001).

Case Worker Education and Support

Caseworker recruitment and retention is a challenge due to the intensity and difficulty of the job. According to Meeting the Challenges of Contemporary Foster Care Study (2004), “90% of state child welfare agencies report difficulty in recruiting and retaining workers.” Research shows that child abuse can be prevented if highly trained social workers made regular visits and are successfully evaluating the foster care family situation, and timely respond to a foster child’s cry for help once abuse is taking place. The reality, however, is that less than 30 percent of child protection workers actually have a professional social work degree, Masters or Bachelors degree in Social Work (MSW,BSW). Also, because of the high rate of turnover, caseworkers often are not involved in a case long enough to identify warning signs of abuse.

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Social workers must be familiar enough with their assigned cases to be able to make recommendations in the best interests of the child. However, workers have so many cases that it is impossible to pay the requisite attention to any one case in particular. Therefore, recurring visits are too spread out for the safety of the foster child. Though in theory the safety of the children in the foster care system is the priority of the state agencies, this is often not the practice. According to the Child Welfare League of America (CWLA), "Recognizing that safety is a paramount consideration in all decisions affecting children in out-of-home care, the National Standards for the Child and Family Services Reviews include the safety-related outcome of reducing the incidence of child abuse and neglect in foster care." (The CWLA Standards of Excellence for Family Foster Care Services, Standards of Excellence for Services to Abused or Neglected Children and Their Families, and Standards of Excellence for Kinship Care Services, 2001). Though the guidelines suggest that safety is of utmost importance within the foster care system, compliance is an issue.

Take for example, a 2009 article outlining the investigation of the fact that Oregon child welfare officials received 16 reports of suspected child abuse or neglect over the years, but records show seven were "closed at screening" and never investigated. The allegations included: sexual abuse, a 4-year-old hit in the head with a telephone book, 5- and 6-year-olds left in a high chair in the garage as punishment, a 6-year-old thrown against a wall, a 10-year-old who was choked, food withheld as a form of punishment, children beaten by sticks, called names and forced to wear dog collars. Case-workers had either ruled the reports "unfounded" or not worth investigating. In the meantime, many of the abusers continued to be certified as foster parents and continued to receive positive reports from state certifiers with no mention of the numerous abuse allegations.

Foster Parent Screening and Training

Poor training, selection, and placement regarding foster care parents are also huge component with respect to re-abuse within the foster care system. All too often adults with insufficient parenting skills are being licensed by the state to take care of our foster youth. For example, in the state of Massachusetts, according to a Boston Globe report, the Massachusetts Department of Social Services "has knowingly approved scores of convicted criminals to be foster parents, including child abusers, drug dealers, habitual drunk drivers, kidnappers, armed robbers, and other violent offenders" (Linda Matchan, Case Raises Questions about DSS, Boston Globe, 2002).

There must be a system where foster care parents undergo a more thorough screening and training process to ensure the proper safety and well-being of youth in the system. While some foster parents have good intentions, it is a reality that some foster parents take in children with poor objectives, such as using them as a source of income. One foster family in New York was able to siphon from the state over \$400,000.00 that belonged to their foster child (Associated Press; Former NY Foster Child Gets Back Swindled 400k., 2011). Also, foster parents sometimes take in children to serve their own psychological and emotional deficits. Potential foster parents need to be adequately screened in order to rule out psychological issues that may be pre-cursors to abuse. "Psychological problems often manifest as high-risk behaviors. Depression and anxiety, for example, may make a person more likely to smoke, abuse alcohol or illicit drugs, or overeat" (U.S. DHHS, 2008).

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Hold Child Welfare System More Accountable

In our current federal and state governments, there is a lack of accountability that allows for states to receive funding for their child welfare programs regardless of performance. The foster care system does not lend itself to providing protection against abuse, and the actual level of re-abuse may be much higher than reported. Marcia Robinson Lowry, a children's advocate and attorney examined this issue during a Congressional hearing and explained, "Foster care systems are cloaked in secrecy that often is used to conceal illegal and unconscionable practices. Every state in the country cloaks its foster care system in secrecy, prohibiting the disclosure of any information about children's experiences in foster care." (Murphy and Vaillancourt, 2006). There must be greater enforcement of current legislation designed to keep the states accountable for how they deal with their individual child welfare systems.

Currently, the Child and Family Services Review (CFSR) is commissioned to keep states accountable by conducting assessments, reviews and reports on each state. As of now, the CFSR is in charge of establishing policies and positive outcome goals for child safety, permanency, and well-being. Additionally, the CFSR establishes state compliance with federal and child welfare policies. However, there are problems with the current CFSR system that encourages a lack of accountability of these states. First, the CFSR reports rely heavily on state's self-assessment which when it comes to abuse is a bit of "the fox reporting on who is in the henhouse."

Federal funds should be allocated with greater discretion and certain national uniform standards need to be met in order to receive money. These standards would include two visits per month, per child from caseworkers, and the child would have access to the caseworker via cell phone. Also, more strict health standards must be met including annual checkups, vision and dental appointments. Discretionary income given to foster families must be limited and should not include clothing stipends or food income. There must be a set amount spent on these items to discourage foster parents from spending the bare minimum on the child and keeping the rest for themselves. Parents should be required to submit expense reports with receipts on a monthly basis to caseworkers. Additionally, foster parents are required to submit an annual budget to ensure that quality care is being provided for each child in their home. As the parents are responsible for submitting these reports to the state agencies, the state agencies are ultimately responsible for submitting these reports to the federal government. If standards are not being met as set forth above, funding should not be issued until compliance is completed. Foster kids will be removed from non-compliant homes and it will be incumbent on the state to place these children in compliant homes. (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). Also, the federal government could consider reducing the state's IVE total by an amount equal a rate per violation of major safety standards.

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Recommendations

When preventative measures fail, there must be a safe place for foster youth to go to in case of emergency. This place would be a temporary facility where children of abuse or neglect could go immediately after reporting their dire circumstances rather than waiting for the system to find them a new placement. All too often children are left in their dangerous environment while waiting for the system to move them and do not have a place to go to escape re-abuse. A safe place would alleviate the circumstances and treat the psychological needs by providing an on-staff therapist. This safe place would be funded under the Title IV-E, Social Security Act. (SSA). Programs under this section of the SSA are Federal Foster Care and Adoption Assistance programs administered by state and local public child welfare agencies for low-income children. The program is an open-ended entitlement funded with a combination of federal, state and local matching funds.

It is absolutely imperative to prevent re-abuse because it will affect a child for the rest of his or her life. Marcus Smith is one such child. Marcus Smith, a young male who was in foster care from an early age became a victim due to this issue. Journalist Bob Port of the New York Daily News reported on Marcus in 2001. He wrote, “For half his life 8-year old Marcus Smith has had to wear a helmet. His padded leather headpiece is a medical device to protect his brain, which has only healed the skin of his scalp to protect the right side of his head. When he was four, Marcus was beaten unconscious, his skull smashed like an eggshell, leaving his brain bruised permanently damaged. A teenager sharing his room decided to use him for wrestling practice. Marcus and his older brother say they were beaten many times in city foster care. They reported the abuse several times, but no action was ever taken” (Bob Port. New York Daily News, 2001.) The foster care agency that oversaw Marcus’s care had ignored complaints from the boy’s mother and grandmother. Indeed, as the newspaper noted, “even as [Marcus] lay in intensive care with a shattered skull, caseworkers submitted an internal report saying he was in good health.” Id. The children of our country deserve better than what Marcus went through.

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Unrealized Opportunities: The Intersection of Abuse and Foster Care

By Ruth Jimenez

One in four women experience domestic violence at some point in their life, ranging from 600,000 to 6 million women each year (Domestic Violence Resource Center, 2008). National data indicates that women are more likely to be abused, and men are more likely to be the abusers (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010). The problem of women inflicted with abuse becomes exacerbated when, under the misnomer of child protection, Child Protective Services (CPS) separates victims of abuse from their children, denying their opportunity to receive services needed to sustain the family unit. Making matters worse, the current foster care system only allows parental care and treatment after the child has been removed from the home and the services end once a child placement has occurred. Accordingly, if the child and family welfare system views mothers as victims of abuse rather than as part of the problem and strives to protect and empower them, families and thereby children would be served in a much more effective manner.

Domestic violence and the foster care system often overlap. In 2007, states reported an estimated 3.5 million children were in families investigated or assessed by CPS workers of which some 794,000 were identified as victims of abuse or neglect (Stoltzfus, 2009). Many of these children come from homes where physical assault and abuse is isolated to one child. When these children speak up about the abuse they received, CPS is obligated to step in to insure that the physical, emotional, and mental well-being of each child is preserved. They are also required to assess the role of each parent played in the abuse. (Actual abuse versus failing to protect a child from abuse) In some situations, the children and family suffer more because of the inability of the social worker to treat other individuals in the family, such as the mother and other siblings, as secondary victims who witnessed the abuse which is just as traumatizing. Similarly, if a child is removed from a home because of abuse and little is done to address the factors that led a mother to be unsuccessful in detecting or preventing the abuse, reunification is unlikely to succeed. Rather than implement the immediate removal of children in families suffering from domestic violence, legal, mental, economic, or community based services could be provided to non-abusive mothers and children to sustain the family unit and help them cope with these very sensitive issues, by standing up to the abuser and learning how to prevent being victims of future abuse.

Abuse Can Take Many Forms

Physical, psychological, and sexual abuse results in many significant effects on the person enduring maltreatment. Frequently, these forms of abuse are inflicted at the same time, further increasing the trauma of the abuse upon the victim. Common reactions women have to domestic violence include fear, depression, substance abuse, chronic physical complaints, and anxiety (National Center for Victims of Crime, 2008). In addition, some types of abuse can cause long-term damage to the victim's mental health (National Coalition Against Domestic Violence, 2011). If left untreated, these mental illnesses may increase a woman's vulnerability to repeated abuse and revictimization (Domestic Violence and Mental Health Policy Initiative, 2003). In cases where a mother is having such reactions, family pres-

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ervation efforts will be necessary not only to stop the abuse but also to address the long term effects discussed above, which on their own are among the causes for a child's removal.

What Types of Help Can Be Provided

At the point where CPS becomes aware of the abuse, temporary removal of a child from the home might be necessary for the immediate safety of the child. However, in cases where the abuser has been removed, the provision of strategic services may help preserve the family unit. For victims of abuse, resources and access to housing, nutrition, and child care services can help the family become re-established with one another during this tumultuous time. Some improvements that would greatly serve mothers who have been abused are increased access to economic, legal, judicial, mental, and emotional support services. Economic services, such as Work First New Jersey, would provide mothers with temporary financial assistance, training, and helpful resources in their search for sustainable employment. Legal and judicial services would provide expert advice and guidance on their rights and the laws and statutes that are applicable to their situations. But by far the most important services that need to be provided to these mothers struggling to keep a cohesive family unit and to avoid CPS from removing their children are mental and emotional support services.

Other federal laws have recognized the need to serve parents in order to better serve or protect a child. For example, the Affordable Care Act, which aims to provide healthcare to an increasing number of children by giving their parents access to preventative services at no charge (Compilation of Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act, 2010). Additionally, the Family Violence Prevention and Services Act (FVPSA) with the Administration for Children and Families provides funding for women and children affected by domestic violence through emergency shelters as well as programs focused on prevention and intervention. In 2009, the FVPSA provided over 156,000 presentations or trainings on domestic violence and services related to victims of domestic violence (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2010).

Recommendations: Changes That Need to Be Made Legislatively

If there are services geared at helping, mothers who were victims of domestic violence, this would in turn help the children by allowing them to stay in the household. Accordingly, current state child protection services laws and regulations should be modified so that social workers have the flexibility to serve non-abusive mothers and children together as a family unit. Once such flexibility is in place, CPS workers will need to be trained in understanding the difference between a mother who herself is an abusive parent and a mother who is a secondary victim of abuse. Such training could be modeled after the Services, Training, Education and Policies to Reduce Domestic Violence, Dating Violence, Sexual Assault and Stalking in Secondary Schools Grant (STEP). This grant program, currently being provided by the Department of Justice, supports projects that provide training to administrators, faculty, and staff to develop strategies and services to support victims of abuse (U.S. Department of Justice, 2011). New child protection services policy also needs to be modified so that the focus is on the removal of the abuser instead of the removal of the child. The Department of Justice provides grants such as the Court Training and Improvements Program and the Legal Assistance for Victims Grant Program. These programs serve as prime examples on how to ensure victim safety and offender accountability.

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Finally, these new policies should be modeled after successful programs such as the Domestic Violence and Mental Health Policy Initiative (DVMHPI), a Chicago-based project. DVMHPI is designed to address and meet the unsatisfied mental health needs of survivors of abuse and their children by providing culturally relevant and trauma-informed services (2011). DVMHPI provides the resources, tools and consensus building opportunities necessary to fill the critical gap in services for survivors with unmet mental health and advocacy needs, to develop more comprehensive responses to the range of trauma-related issues faced by domestic violence survivors and their children, and to develop strategies for addressing both the social and psychological conditions that perpetuate abuse and violence across generations. The broad spectrum of services is aimed at providing the framework and resources to permit domestic violence and mental health agencies and training programs nationwide to collaborate and work more effectively with individuals who are dealing with domestic violence and mental health issues.

Results of Change/Hopes for Improved System

The majority of mothers have a very natural, innate instinct to protect their children. Despite this, sadly, some mothers find themselves in situations where abuse occurs anyway. Understanding the correlation between domestic violence and child maltreatment allows for the system to respond effectively to both, equally compelling needs. The lives of thousands of children could have ended differently if only their mothers had been provided with essential services and opportunities they needed to fulfill their obligations to their children. Some would probably not have been able to remain in their homes, their mothers would be more mentally sound, and many of the difficulties facing mothers would have been avoided.

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Creating a Brighter Future

By Desiree Parker

Throughout the United States there is a population of youth who are often overlooked. This population is our foster children. These youth have the potential to be some of the most gifted and inspiring scholars in our nation. However, many times foster children are not informed about independent living programs that are available to help them increase the positive outcomes of their young adult lives. Despite the federal government's continued annual investment in foster youth having what they need to achieve independent after foster care, the outcomes of many foster youth are bleak. While there are many reasons for this, chief among them is that a high number of eligible foster youth are unaware of the programs meant to serve them. If the federal government hopes to improve the outcomes for youth aging out of care, one way to do that is to raise awareness of the purpose and existence of independent living programs.

The John H. Chafee Foster Care Independence Program was created to offer assistance to current and former foster youth in achieving independence and self-sufficiency. The Chafee Act provides \$140 million (about \$1,400 per eligible youth) per year in grants that are provided to States and Tribes that implement plans to help youth in areas such as financial management, housing, educational goals, and employment. While these types of services may not seem imperative for many other 16-21 year olds, to a foster child these services serve as critical the stepping-stones to a brighter future. In the words of former foster care youth, Marilyn Monroe, "We are all of us stars, and we deserve to twinkle."

Independent living programs have the intention to help prepare the almost 30,000 youth who are "aging out" of care and into adulthood. However, according to the Network on Transitions to Adulthood, only two-fifths of eligible foster youth actually receive independent living services (Courtney, 2005). Research shows that the youth who do not have knowledge or access to independent living programs are more likely to suffer negative outcomes upon aging out of care. Many of these outcomes ultimately end up guiding these youth back to "into the care" of the state as an adult. This can be in the form of public welfare, criminal justice, or other systems of support (Fernandes, 2010). More specifically, of the youth who age out of care each year, only three percent will graduate from college with a four-year degree (Casey Family Programs, 2003). While 50% of aged out youth experience unemployment within five years, and 65% of youth who are leaving foster care need immediate housing upon release (Casey Family Programs, 2003). Finally, 25% of those who have already aged out will be incarcerated within two years of being emancipated (Courtney, 2004).

One reason youth are not accessing independent living programs is that they simply do not know that they exist or learn about them after they are no longer eligible. In an informal poll of the 15 interns in the 2011 FYI program, 40% reported that they did not receive any aid from independent living programs because they were not aware of them. In part, this lack of awareness can be attributed to the lack of training provided to social workers. In a study on children in foster care in Arizona, foster youth attributed this lack of awareness to high caseworker turnover, and caseworkers lack of knowledge on these programs and services (Fernandes, 2008). In my own experience, I was not aware of

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independent living programs because my social worker never informed me of them. I was not aware of the aid that I could have received until I was in my sophomore year of college. Interestingly, I stumbled upon these services after completing my social work curriculum in college.

Another possible reason for the lack of awareness in regards to independent living programs lies in the hands of foster parents. In some cases, foster parents themselves are not informed about independent living programs; in other situations, foster parents do not want to put in the effort or take time to aid their foster children in receiving independent living services. The lack of knowledge and motivation to help foster youth through key players in the foster care system contributes to foster youth not being able to attain positive life outcomes.

Notably, some foster youth know of independent living programs but choose not to utilize them or discontinue use because they feel they are ineffective. For example, one foster youth intern, Lakeshia Dorsey, who did receive aid from independent living programs, did not have a positive experience. Dorsey stated, "I went to a class one time and was taught how to use a calculator as a senior in high school. The class made me feel stupid, and the teacher talked to us like we were helpless victims. I didn't want to go back."

Solutions

Although data is scarce at the moment, data to evaluate the effectiveness of the Independent Living Program has begun to be collected. For example, the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) recently contracted with the Urban Institute and its partners to conduct the five year Multi-Site Evaluation of Foster Youth Programs. The goal of the evaluation is to determine if there is a direct correlation between independent living programs and the successful achievement of key outcomes such as increased educational attainment, higher employment rates and stability, greater interpersonal and relationship skills, reduced non-marital pregnancy and births, and reduced delinquency and crime rates. One way that the federal government can help increase awareness of independent living programs, is to assess to what extent the lack of awareness is the main cause of youth not receiving services.

Another important and relatively simple way to successfully raise awareness within both the foster youth is to provide a survey or questionnaire to each and every foster youth prior to their emancipation. The purpose of this survey would be to gauge whether the youth has been made aware of the ILP and its benefits and by whom. Some of the sample questions on the questionnaire could be as simple as, "Have you received any help from any of independent living programs in your state? Have you thought about continuing your education after high school? In which direction do you see your future going?" This survey aims to meet two main goals. The first is to raise awareness about the existence of independent living programs and what they offer. The second goal is to be able to utilize this data in order to hold states accountable for monitoring and informing the youth and pertinent figures in that youth's life.

By making this relatively simple amendment to the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, the goal of increasing awareness of the independent living program can be achieved. With the twinkling of more stars, the future cannot help but look brighter for future foster care youth.

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SAMPLE SURVEY

Independent Living Program Questionnaire

1. *Have you been made aware of the independent living programs that are available to you?*
2. *If so, have these programs been helpful to you?*
3. *Has anyone talked to you about your future after exiting foster care?*
4. *Has anyone discussed a post-secondary educational plan with you?*
5. *Have you been informed about housing programs available to you once you turned 18?*
6. *Did anyone teach you how and/or help you set up a bank account?*
7. *Has anyone taught you how to fill out a job application?*
8. *Have you had training on how to complete a resume?*
9. *Is there anything that you would like to be taught that you believe would be helpful to you for furthering your future after exiting foster care?*
10. *Other Comments/Questions*

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There is No Place Like Home

By Taatianna VanReed

When the child welfare system decides to commit a child into their care, the government must remember that it is exactly as it implies; a commitment. Children and youth who are removed from the care of the parents are placed in the hands of the government to raise them. The government is responsible for guiding, protecting, providing for youth, and preparing them for adulthood just as a parent would. Part of this responsibility includes providing for basic life necessities such as clothing, food, and most importantly, housing.

The reality is that the system is not doing its job to help connect youth who age out of foster care with stable, safe and affordable housing. In fact, a recent study on homelessness within the foster youth population, showed that nearly 40% of former foster youth aged 23-24 have reported either being homeless or being forced to couch surf (Chapin Hall, 2010). This stark reality makes locating safe and stable housing after foster care one of the primary concerns of youth transitioning to independence. (GAO, 2004, 2007). "Youth reported difficulties in renting housing because they lacked an employment or credit history, and they had no co-signer. The availability of housing often depends on where the youth lives, and in some cases the benefits that were provided did not cover the actual need or were only available to a certain type of youth.

A March 2010 analysis done by University of Washington's Partners for Our Children, youth from foster care are most likely to be homeless within the first year of exiting care. This phenomena is no less likely if that year occurs when the youth is 21 rather than 18. Approximately 6 percent of the Midwest Study participants became homeless within the first month, 14 percent became homeless within the first year, and 20 percent became homeless within the first 2 years.

Existing Federal Programs for Transitioning Foster Youth

In 1999, the federal government created the John Chafee Foster Care Independence Program. It has since become a major part of the child welfare system, brought about to assist youth as they transition to adulthood. One of the goals of the ILP program is to help reduce the number of homeless former foster youth. While this program has helped thousands of foster youth, it is not meeting the full need. Under the provisions of the bill, States can use up to 30% of the \$138 million in total funding to provide housing assistance, to foster youth. Each state receives a portion of that money and 30% goes directly towards housing for youth. Put another way, states could dedicate the full 30% of \$138 million to housing and that would still only translate to \$1,456 per foster youth each year (cite). This leaves foster youth a monthly rent budget of \$121. Given that the average rent in America's 10 largest cities is approximately \$2,000 a year, this amount is clearly insufficient to adequately meet the needs of all eligible youth in order to allow them to succeed.

Another governmental program that was created to aid in this effort is the Family Unification Program (FUP), funded by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development. Through FUP, \$20 million is given nationally allowing states to distribute funds for 18 months. This program is created for families who lack adequate housing or youth who are at least 18 years old but not more than 21 years

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old who left foster care at age 16 or later. Overall, FUP is a great program that could initially help the lives of many foster youth. The program can do an even more effective job by increasing the allotted time to support foster youth beyond the required 18 months. Especially since the first two years out of care are among the most critical.

The Fostering Connections to success and increasing adoptions act of 2008 is a law that requires states to have a meeting with the youth prior to transitioning out of care to discuss skills that the youth should know before the phasing out period. This helps with providing awareness to the youth. However this is merely a discussion that is required on paper not anything the states have to act upon after the child is no longer in care and no longer their concern. There is also no true way of monitoring the content of these conversations or even making sure that this is actually happening in everyday practice. In addition, the initial time frame for this notification appears to be a small period of time. According to this law, the child welfare agency is only held to the 90 day standard. This means that they must inform the youth of his/her plan 90 days before the department leaves him/her. Some would argue that this is not an effective time frame, and the short notice is what lead them to homelessness.

To address the issue of homeless among former foster youth, policy makers should:

- Extend the maximum age that a youth can remain in foster care. In recent years, federal policymakers have encouraged states to increase this age from 18 to 21 through the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act of 2008, however, this was not mandated. Although this change would still leave the foster youth in need of a place to live after the age of 21, the additional years in foster care would allow youth more time to prepare to be self-sufficient and be able to provide housing for themselves upon exiting the foster care system.
- Increase funding for the Chafee program to allow more youth access to the benefit that is entitled to them by aging out of the foster care system.
- Use the FUP program and create a set-aside for former foster youth to ensure funding for housing is available to former foster youth. In addition, the 18 month limitation should be extended to 24 months to allow foster youth adequate time to become self-sufficient.
- Develop a Foster Youth Loan Program. This program developed by the government who in fact are the parents of the foster youth will have a plan that will not require them to have co-signers for their loan. The loan could be distributed on a yearly basis should include a minimal or zero interest rate in order to avoid accrued debt. The program would have basic requirements for eligibility. The foster youth must either be working or a student currently taking classes. The program would offer classes and trainings on how to pay your bills, finance and budget, and basic skills of living on your own. It would provide a safety net for youth in case in the event of an emergency or incident that prevents them from paying their bill. These can be matters such as an injury, severe illness, or continued financial hardship. The program will be a way to provide stability for the youth and teach them how to manage on their own. The youth will pay the money back that they borrowed over time and will be expected to budget, and manage their money.
- Mandate that social workers, or child welfare professionals need to notify the youth on their caseload as far out as 6 months in advance. This provides plenty of time to discuss and create a plan, for said youth. With a decent plan, we can almost guarantee success.

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ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Kadidjia Adula

Hometown: Queens, NY

Age: 21

School: Cornell University

Major: Biology and Society

Graduation Date: May 2013

Years in Care: 9

Status: Aged Out

Favorite Quote: "When I dare to be powerful - to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid" -Andre Lorde

Aspirations: To be a Gynecologist; focusing on women who have undergone female genital mutilation and continue to work on foster care issues.



Marjorie Delgadillo

Hometown: Marin County, CA

Age: 27

School: Dominican University of California

Major: Humanities; Minor in Social Cultural Studies with a Latin American emphasis

Graduation Date: May 2007

Years in Care: 5

Status: Aged Out

Favorite Quote: "Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength; loving someone deeply gives you courage." -Lao Tzu

Aspirations: To help immigrant children who are lost in the foster care system.



Lakeshia Dorsey

Hometown: Diamond Bar, CA

Age: 25

School: Southwestern Law School

Major: Focus - Juvenile and Criminal Law

Graduation Date: May 2013

Years in Care: 17

Status: Guardianship

Favorite Quote: "God grant me the serenity to accept the things that I cannot change; the courage to change the things that I can; the wisdom to know the difference." -Serenity Prayer

Aspirations: To become a dependency or family court judge.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Ruth Jimenez

Hometown: Camden, NJ

Age: 22

School: Kingston University

Major: International Conflict

Graduation Date: June 2011

Years in Care: 6

Status: Independent Living

Favorite Quote: "Your story may not have such a happy ending, but that doesn't make you who you are. It is the rest of your story, who you choose to be. So who are you?"

Aspirations: To work with the UN Office on Drugs and Crime on human trafficking and migrant smuggling.



Mitsu Klines

Hometown: Los Angeles, CA

Age: 24

School: Boise State University

Major: Mass Communication

Graduation Date: December 2011

Years in Care: 16

Status: Emancipated

Favorite Quote: "Nothing of me is original. I am the combined effort of everyone I've ever known." -Chuck Palahniuk

Aspirations: To graduate from college and start a professional career in reporting and journalism. More specifically, adoption journalism, focusing on child welfare issues.



Linda Lee Zambito

Hometown: Lakeland, FL

Age: 21

School: Florida International University

Major: Public Administration

Graduation Date: May 2012

Years in Care: 9

Status: Adopted as an adult

Favorite Quote: "I long to accomplish a great and noble task, but it is my chief duty to accomplish small tasks as if they were great and noble" -Helen Keller

Aspirations: My interests are "development and sustainability." "Sustainability" is the success of any "development."

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Marisela Ortiz

Hometown: Tri-Cities, WA

Age: 22

School: Washington State University

Major: Criminal Justice

Graduation Date: May 2011

Years in Care: 8

Status: Aged Out

Favorite Quote: "For I am my dreaming self just as truly as I am my waking self."

Aspirations: My career path will allow me to continue advocating for the at-risk population and allows advancement with a reform in the foster care system.



Desiree Parker

Hometown: Bangor, WI

Age: 20

School: Viterbo University

Major: Social Work

Graduation Date: May 2012

Years in Care: 14

Status: Emancipated

Favorite Quote: "There are times I've suffered shipwreck in my journeys: In perils of robbers; In perils of false brethren: In perils of my own design. Yet, from these perils comes knowledge. Only from within may we truly shine."

Aspirations: Receive a M.S.W. then become a military social worker.



Amy Peters

Hometown: Bayard, NE

Age: 21

School: University of Nebraska - Lincoln

Major: Criminal Justice/Psychology, Pre-Law

Graduation Date: December 2012

Years in Care: 6

Status: Emancipated

Favorite Quote: "If you can make the world a better place for children, you will have succeeded in making it a better place for everyone."

Aspirations: My goal is to go to law school and pursue a career in family or juvenile law.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Jessie Peterson

Hometown: Oxnard, CA

Age: 20

School: San Francisco State University

Major: Political Science and Criminal Justice

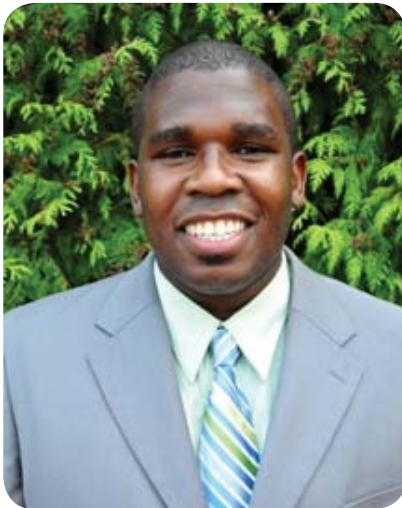
Graduation Date: May 2013

Years in Care: 18 years in and out of care

Status: Emancipated

Favorite Quote: "Go Somewhere, Do Something, Be Somebody"

Aspirations: Finish my undergraduate studies at San Francisco State University, then attend law school or graduate school for public policy. I want to make a difference in other people's lives through whatever career path I decide to take."



Derrick Riggins

Hometown: Orlando, FL

Age: 26

School: Florida A&M University (BSW); Florida State University (MSW)

Major: Social Work

Graduation Date: May 2009

Years in Care: 4

Status: Aged Out

Favorite Quote: "None of us got where we are solely by pulling ourselves up by our bootstraps. We got here because somebody - a parent, a teacher, an Ivy League crony or a few nuns - bent down and helped us pick up our boots." -Thurgood Marshall

Aspirations: Make changes to public policy, then pursue a law degree.



Melanie Roberts

Hometown: Omaha, NE

Age: 34

School: University of Missouri Kansas City

Major: Psychology

Years in Care: 15

Status: Emancipated

Favorite Quote: "The biggest disease today is the feeling of being unwanted. People need to be loved, without love people die." -Princess Diana

Aspirations: Earn my Masters in public affairs and administration, then become the executive director of a non-profit organization focused on foster youth. I feel I can empower, motivate and inspire youth.

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



Madison Sandoval-Lunn

Hometown: Las Vegas, NV

Age: 20

School: University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Major: Public Administration and Political Science

Graduation Date: May 2013

Years in Care: 7.5

Status: Adopted

Favorite Quote: "Character cannot be achieved in ease and quiet. Only through trials and tribulations can the soul be strengthened, ambitions inspired, and success achieved." -Helen Keller

Aspirations: To run my own non-profit organization and work on public policy issues.



Richard Terrell

Hometown: Minneapolis, MN

Age: 24

School: North Central University

Major: Communications

Graduation Date: May 2011

Years in Care: 8

Status: Kinship Care

Favorite Quote: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways acknowledge him; and he shall direct your paths." -Proverbs 3:5

Aspirations: To attend law school and then practice law to help small businesses.



Taatianna VanReed

Hometown: San Diego, CA

Age: 20

School: Hampton University

Major: Political Science

Graduation Date: May 2013

Years in Care: 16

Status: Relative Kinship Guardianship

Favorite Quote: "The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy." -Martin Luther King Jr.

Aspirations: Go on to law school and as a lawyer advocate for youth in foster care.

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