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**Sent:** Wednesday, September 25, 2013 12:04 PM  
**To:** scott.corcoran@afamilyforeverychild.org  
**Subject:** AFFEC Family Finding September 2013



**A Family For Every Child  
2013**

**September**

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## **Family Finding Success Story: Isaac and Ross\***

In the first five years of their lives, twins Isaac and Ross have already faced the emotionally challenging separation of their parents. First from their father's home, and then shortly after their mother's. They were placed into multiple foster homes and split from their sister, Sylvia, in the process.

As the boys are so young, they have little understanding of what is going on around them. The confusion of being moved from home to home, as well as being detached from their family has been very hard on them. Ross and Isaac's caseworker became concerned that the boys had been in care too long legally and emotionally. The Family Finding Program was able to help locate and organize a support system for Isaac and Ross and potentially lead to placement back with their mother.

The Family Finding volunteer program began by mining Ross and Isaac's files to perform internet searches and find potential family members and friends who would like to be involved in their lives. Once information was found for possible connections, phone calls were made in order to gain more information about the children and the people in their lives. Relatives who were contacted served as great resources to further develop a family tree for the boys and determine who would serve as supportive and positive individuals for Isaac and Ross. These people were invited to participate in a Family Meeting designed to focus on the children's needs and put together a plan that would work to generate the best possible outcome for Isaac and Ross.

During the contacting phase of the process, several

family members were identified who wanted to become involved in the meeting, including Ross and Isaac's mother, Marissa, their maternal grandparents, Chris and Kathy, and the paternal grandmother, Barbara. An assortment of uncles and cousins were also dedicated to being a supportive resource for the boys. At the meeting several permanent placement options were discussed. Their mother was working to find suitable housing in order to get the boys back and has been very compliant with all of her other duties thus far. All other family members were on board to support her in any way necessary including providing transportation and shelter, teaching appropriate parenting techniques, and being an emotional support in general. An aunt and uncle even offered to adopt Ross and Isaac if necessary.

Throughout the Family Finding process, it has become clear that Ross and Isaac have an extremely close and loving family who are dedicated to support the boys as they grow up and ensure their knowledge that they are well loved no matter where they are.

\*Names has been changed

## Volunteer Positions

**Are you a caseworker looking to find a lifelong support system for youth in foster care?**

A Family For Every Child's Family Finding Program makes it their mission to find loving connections and family for children in foster care and help kids in Lane County and other parts of Oregon reach this goal.

If you are interested in referring a child or partnering with AFFEC, please contact Caitlin Baird at [caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org](mailto:caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org)

**File Mining:** Research child welfare case files and gather as many relatives' names and contact information as you can find (don't forget kith connections, too!) This role requires someone who is detail-oriented, a good problem solver, and a great researcher. This role also requires someone who is available during daytime business hours, and can commit 2 to 6 hours.

**Internet Research/Calling and Engagement:** Use the internet to find updated contact information for relatives, more family information, and more connections. Call phone numbers found in the files, case notes, and online in order to try and reach kith and kin connections. Ask individuals you speak with for more connections' names and contact information while

determining how committed one might be to the child. This role can be performed from home and requires 5 to 25 hours per case.

**Genealogy Specialist:** Build family trees and research family history for cases so that children may have a better understanding of their roots. This role can be done from home and requires 2 to 10 hours per case.

To sign up as a volunteer or intern with A Family For Every Child, please visit our [volunteer sign up](#) page.

If you have further questions regarding any of the mentioned positions, please contact Caitlin Baird at [caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org](mailto:caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org)

## Shifting Focus: York County Reduces Need for Foster Care

*By Christina Kauffman*

Despite a growing caseload, York County has decreased the number of children in foster care over the past six years, focusing on rehabilitating broken families and placing at-risk children with kin instead of strangers. Recently released data from the Administrative Office of Pennsylvania Courts shows the number of children placed in foster homes fell by 45 percent, dropping from 633 in 2006 to 345 as of this past March.

The decrease is part of a statewide trend after a bundle of foster-care-reduction initiatives were unveiled several years ago. York's 45 percent decline outperformed the state's overall decrease of 34 percent during the same six-year period. The number of children in foster care statewide fell from 21,39 to 14,139, according to the data.

York County family court Judge Maria Musti-Cook said the paradigm shift started around 2007, after the state Supreme Court directed counties to use simple yet effective programs such as "Family Group Decision Making."

When a family is referred to the York County Office of Children, Youth and Families, the county now takes more of an "it takes a village" strategy, holding a conference involving the child's extended family and other support systems instead of only involving the immediate family. Everyone from aunts, uncles and grandparents to church members and employers are invited to join the conversation about how the parent or parents could better care for the child, Musti-Cook said.

Instead of the county directing a course of action, the family and its support system work together to develop their own plan.

"It could be a plan to provide for simple things like transportation to get kids to school and appointments or medical attention, like who's going to get them to appointments and who will pay for it," she said.

Many families are able to pull together to avoid a need for placing the child in foster care, the judge said.

'Family Finding': While the group decision process has kept some children in their homes, others remain at risk under the primary care of their parents, Musti-Cook said. The county uses "Family Finding," a strategy that's now written into law and requires social workers to find relatives or close family friends to make connections with the children.

If a child can't remain with a parent, the preference is to place him or her in the long-term care of such a relative or friend, she said.

"The purpose is to keep families together, because we know statistics on foster kids when they age out of the system ... are horrendous," she said. "The goal is not only to keep them with their families, but to find permanency for them if they can't stay with their families, and not just have them languishing in the system forever."

Data show children who were in foster care are more likely to commit crimes or be imprisoned, perhaps the result of instability, she said.

Changing emphasis: The Office of Children, Youth and Families was previously much more likely to immediately remove a child from a home, said director Kim James.

"It used to be that when kids came into contact with the agency, the first priority was safety and if they were not safe with their family of origin, to place them in foster care to keep them safe until they could be," she said.

There's now more of an effort to "front-load services" to families on their first contact, so the child can remain at home and be safe, she said.

The caseload at the Office of Children, Youth and Families has been steadily increasing as population grows and people become more aware of the need to report abuses, she said.

There were 2,800 referrals to the agency in 2006, growing to 3,500 referrals in 2012, she said. This year is on track to pass last year, with 1,779 referrals through June, she said.

Part of the increase is attributed to an increase in awareness because of the child sex abuse scandal surrounding former Penn State coach Jerry Sandusky, she said, and people have become more in-tune to the signs of abuse.

Most referrals don't involve sexual abuse, but instead range from neglect to suspected physical abuse.

Many families are referred by "mandated reporters," such as nurses, doctors, day care providers and teachers,

who are legally obligated to report suspected abuse, she said.

Foster care can be avoided through education and family assistance in most cases, she said. The number of children placed in the care of kin has grown from about 25 last year to more than 100 this year, year-to-date, she said.

A fine line: While officials have praised the decrease in children in foster care, Musti-Cook said the county has been "hyper-focused" on reuniting families and placing children with kin instead of up for adoption.

"There are times when I think we have swung a little too far now," she said. "I think sometimes we go a little long on finding that permanency. It's a fine line that you walk, especially for young children."

When a child has been in the county's care for 15 months, the law mandates an evaluation to "convince the court that it shouldn't move forward and terminate parental rights," she said.

"I think there are those cases where we wait a little bit too long, because it's not always necessary to wait 15 months," she said. "If you know after six months ... that the parents can't get it together, you shouldn't be waiting 15 months. This is a long time for a child to wait for some type of permanency.

## **Home for the Holidays: Winter Wonderland**

Home for the Holidays is our Winter Wonderland themed annual event which includes a beautiful evening of dinner, wine, dessert, and an auction benefiting thousands of waiting foster children. In this years auction we will be showcasing getaways to the Caribbean, an outing with Olympians Ashton Easton and Brianne Theisen, and many other fun and unique auction packages.

Our event is November 12th, 2013 and will be held at Valley River Inn in Eugene, Oregon. Tickets are 75 dollars and you surely don't want to miss this beautiful evening.



**Want to Volunteer?  
Donate to our Auction?  
Sponsor A Home for the Holidays?**

**Contact:**  
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[rebecca@afamilyforeverychild.org](mailto:rebecca@afamilyforeverychild.org)

**Want to purchase a ticket?**  
[Click here!](#)

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