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Sent: Tuesday, September 04, 2012 2:07 AM
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Subject: AFFEC Family Finding September 2012



Family Finding Program

[A Family For Every Child](#)

September 2012

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Would you like to contribute to A Family For Every Child's cause for helping children? Any amount can have a lasting impact on a child. Click below!



**Extensive Team
Recruitment -
Community
Symposium
Success!**

Thank you to everyone who attended our community symposium on Extensive Team Recruitment on August 8th! We hope to begin working with children in this great new program as soon as possible.

Thank you for all of your support!

Family Finding as an Identity Builder

The most common question I find among Family Finding skeptics is "Why would you want to find a foster child's family when you removed them from that family?" The question is poignant, it's obvious in some cases, and it's fair. However, the question doesn't end the argument as to why Family Finding is beneficial to all children in care, even those with particularly unhealthy individuals in their family network.

The goal of Family Finding is to discover and engage relatives and other important relations for children in foster care with the hopes of those individuals becoming permanent resources and lifelong connections. In most cases, a number of healthy, loving family members are found and reengaged in a child's life. They can become an adoptive resource, a respite care provider, a resource for the child academically, a person to call, or any number of other supports that many take for granted on a daily basis that are often not available to foster youth. Even when such resources do not emerge, families are often ready and capable to provide pictures, stories, and some family history.

While sometimes adoptive resources are not found, and visiting relatives is not a possibility, the prospect of family being "out there" and getting to learn about their origins is immensely valuable for foster children. For numerous young children and teens, seeing a picture of someone who "looks just like me" is enough to make them feel like they belong.

Many of us grow up knowing where we came from. While there are times when we feel alone, unwanted, or rejected, we know our roots, our kin, our origins. Many foster youth do not share this knowledge. They have little sense of their history and culture and thus have difficulty shaping their identity. Family Finding helps them piece together their origins and their family tree, allowing them to feel grounded in a place of belonging.

So, "Why would you want to find a foster child's family when you removed them from that family?" Well, because that family can still be a resource for legal and emotional permanency. But also, because the child has a right to know about where they came from, and incorporate their background into their identity.

**Become a Family Finding
Volunteer**

Have you always wanted to help a foster child, but don't have

Moving Towards Extensive Team Recruitment

Our "Family Finding" process is constantly improving with new services available to those who are referred. Now, whenever a youth is referred to A Family For Every Child's Family Finding program, the new offer of access to our Mentor Program and professional photos taken of the youth is extended to the child's caseworker. This relates to the start of our new program, Extensive Team Recruitment, which will offer all of that and more to each child who is referred.

Assigning a mentor to each youth increases the chance of permanency in a child's life. The more solid connections we can create for a child, the more likely it is that they will feel loved, and they have a better chance at achieving more positive outcomes such as attending college, avoiding drug or alcohol use, and having improved relationships with family members and other adults.

Photos taken of the youth offers him or her a chance to feel more self-confident, and they can be used for general recruitment if needed. Often times children in foster care move frequently and do not have many pictures of themselves as they grow throughout the years - these photos rekindle that missed opportunity for them.

When Children Age Out of Care...

Many of the children we serve as a part of Lane County Family Finding are older youth, ages 10 and up, who may be at risk of aging out of care when

the resources to be a foster or adoptive family?

Do you have proficient research and/or communication skills that you would like to exercise?

Do you have some extra time during the evening/weekend hours to dedicate to a good cause?

If you've answered yes to any of these questions, you should apply to become a Family Finding volunteer!

Jobs available:

File mining: Show off your research and notetaking skills by file mining for our Family Finding program! Search through child welfare case files and look for clues as to who is related to or committed to that child. File miners must have some availability during working hours in order to visit the Department of Human Services and mine the files. File mining takes anywhere from 2 - 6 hours.

Internet Research: Search the web for more relatives, updated contact information, social media profiles, and more! This can be done on your time within the Family Finding deadlines.

Calling and Engagement: Call and speak with relatives and other contacts who may be a resource for the child. This role involves engaging family members, meeting with caseworkers and other staff, and attending family meetings. This volunteer should have excellent communication skills and the ability to keep privileged information confidential. This can be done on your own time within the Family Finding deadlines.

All Family Finding volunteers must be able to pass a criminal background check, fill out a volunteer form, and attend a Family Finding training. Our next Family Finding training is on September 22nd from 9AM until noon. Email A Family For Every Child's Permanency Director in order to reserve your space at caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org

Finding Hope After Trauma: The Remarkable Recovery of the Adolescent Brain

By Gary Stangler

Executive Director of Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative

It's no secret that many children in foster care experience trauma, which Gary Stangler, the Executive Director of the Jim Casey Youth Opportunities Initiative discusses in his piece below. He also covers the importance of a support network, the resilience of children, and the lack of resources for many who "age out" of the system.

Young people who have experienced trauma are extraordinarily resilient. Whether it's a child in a homeless shelter who discovers the joy of reading or newly minted college graduates who overcame poverty - their ability to recover from traumatic events is nothing short of remarkable.

Nowhere is this clearer than among the population of young people who have been in foster care.

Having spent the last three decades working for improvements to foster care in the U.S., I am constantly inspired by the resilience I see in young people disproportionately affected by trauma. And yet, we are not doing all we can to support them.

For young people in foster care, that support network is essential, especially when you consider how significantly this population is impacted by traumatic events. In fact, a 2005 study conducted by Casey Family Programs found rates of PTSD in

aging out of care when they turn eighteen. Once they are emancipated from the system, they may have some residual resources from the child welfare system.

They may have graduated from independent living programs, taken life skills classes and the like, but a large number of youth are without permanent, supportive individuals in their life. Many young adults therefore leave the child welfare system without a stable home, a structured plan for the future, and without the necessary experience to find a job or apply for a higher education.

Programs such as Family Finding are a resource for finding emotional permanency for such youth, and locating individuals who can be resources for them once they graduate from foster care. Relatives, past foster parents, mentors, former teachers, and many others are able to aptly assist former foster youth in finding the resources and providing the support that they need in order to succeed.

This can change the sometimes dismal outcome for many who age out of the foster care system.

*Statistics:

Foster Youth who have aged out of care are 17.1% more likely to not have a GED or high school diploma.

52% of youth who age out of foster care are unemployed, while youth of the general population have a 24.5% unemployment rate.

57% of foster youth who leave the system have health insurance, and 78% of their peers who were not a part of the foster care system have health insurance.

Males who leave foster care without permanent resources are 63.8% more likely to be arrested.

young people formerly in foster care to be more than twice that of U.S. war veterans.

Trauma comes in all forms, and whether the trauma young people in foster care experience is defined by physical or sexual abuse, moving from place to place, being separated from siblings and other loved ones, or living in a disjointed system -- its impact can be devastating. Without access to a supportive family or network, young people in foster care -- especially those who abruptly age out of the foster care system -- don't have the same opportunity to recover and move on.

And yet, it is precisely during that window of their young lives -- between ages 14 and 25 -- that young people have the most potential for recovery and resilience. New advances in neuroscience tell us that the brain is not "done" by age six, as previously thought. Instead, the adolescent brain continues to develop, providing a "use it or lose it" timeframe similar to that which exists in early childhood. Even after significant trauma, the brain can indeed rewire itself -- meaning that the physiological consequences of trauma can be reversed.

Systems that support young people must seize this window of opportunity.

For those in foster care, especially those placed in care following a traumatic experience, maintaining stable relationships with responsible and caring family members, teachers, or other mentors provides a critical sense of support and rootedness. Child welfare systems should encourage and create opportunities for these relationships to develop and thrive.

We must also help young people who have experienced trauma forge healthy connections with support networks that are important to their ongoing well-being. Specifically, gaining experiences that encourage them to stay in school and navigate their way to college or technical training, such as internships and part-time jobs and community-based activities, like after-school sports or music groups.

These connections help build young people's self-confidence, help them see what is possible, and often provide the springboard for achieving important life goals like renting an apartment or securing a job. Through my own career working with youth leadership groups dedicated to young people in foster care, I have seen individuals emerge from quiet and reserved to articulate spokespeople on complex policy issues that have direct meaning in their lives.

Navigating through the challenges of adolescence is not easy for any young person, let alone a young person who has experienced significant trauma. Because of this, we must extend foster care beyond the age of 18. We do not assume that our own children have every support they will ever need by the time they turn 18; transitioning into adulthood is not a one-day event. We must advocate for the inclusion of supportive, age-appropriate social services for young people in foster care that more closely mirror the experiences of young people in supportive, intact families.

In an ideal world, no young person would ever experience trauma. But until that happens, let's make sure that all young people have the support necessary to rewire and recover. They deserve nothing less.

Unfair! What About Older Foster Youth and Their Families?

By Michael Piraino
CEO, National CASA Association

Michael Piraino's article below discusses the outcomes for older children in foster care, which are ignored all too often. Many of these older children experience dismal consequences due to a lack

Females who age out of foster care are 36.6% more likely to become pregnant.

*Stein, Melissa, [Extending Foster Care Beyond 18: Improving Outcomes for Older Youth](#). National Resource Center for Permanency and Family Connections, May 2012

of permanency in their life. With no one to turn to, this population is not just ignored, but disenfranchised, while little known programs like "Family Finding" are working to find loved ones and establish better outcomes for such youth.

Data doesn't have to lie to ignore the truth. In the case of the annual adoption and foster care report issued by the federal government, ignoring the full truth is unfair to foster youth. Although all foster youth are waiting for a more permanent home, the phrase "waiting children" generally refers to those who are waiting for adoption.

In its annual [AFCARS reports](#) on foster care and adoption, the federal government refers to waiting children as those with a goal of adoption or whose parents' rights have been terminated. But wait -- youth 16 or older with a goal of "emancipation" are excluded. That's a huge group who are written out. Nearly 21,000 foster youth have that goal and an even larger number end up there. I guess a family is no longer in the cards for those 16-year-olds.

That's a sad state of affairs. Emancipation -- at age 18, or in some states, age 21 -- is an ominous outcome. Instead of a permanent, legal connection to a family, emancipation is too often a [pathway](#) into homelessness, joblessness, and various other "nesses" that should be totally unacceptable to us. That's why it's important to know more about this group of youth -- who often refer to themselves as being "warehoused" until they get too old to stay in foster care.

A [report](#) from the federal government showed that children of color may be subjected to this lousy outcome more often than other foster youth. But that report is dated 2003, and there's nothing in the AFCARS reports since then to help us know what's going on.

And there's more. The AFCARS definition of waiting children also excludes those waiting for the most common foster care outcome: return to the parent or primary guardian. This is a big group -- Data doesn't have to lie to ignore the truth. In the case of the annual adoption and foster care report issued by the federal government, ignoring the full truth is unfair to foster youth more than twice the size of the adoption group. But while adoption is mentioned nine times in the AFCARS report, reunification only gets two mentions. Two of the five pages of the AFCARS report are devoted exclusively to adoption information. Not a single page is devoted exclusively to reunification.

Why is this a problem? Because it makes it difficult to determine whether different groups of foster children and their families are being treated fairly. For example, for children waiting for adoption, the report tells us their average age, age at entry into care, types of placements they are in, race and ethnicity, gender, median time in care, and how long they have waited. For the larger group of children waiting to go home, the report is silent in all categories.

I have nothing against adoption (full disclosure: I'm an adoptive dad and proud of it). But for foster youth, all avenues to loving, permanent homes are vital. And all the data on these outcomes is important because we need to know which avenues are working well and whether they are working equitably for all foster youth.

So, here's my recommendation to the feds: pay as much attention in your annual reports to all forms of permanency as you do to adoption. And don't ignore those for whom the promise of a permanent home is no longer even a promise.

It Takes a Village and We Need You!

We want and need your help to spread the word! Here are ways you can help us recruit for kids:

- Email us any supports, training's, activities, blogs, anything that could help. Contact: Christy@afamilyforeverychild.org
 - Become a [volunteer](#)
 - Donate, attend, or become a sponsor at our [event](#)
 - Host a Heart Gallery. christina.parra@afamilyforeverychild.org
 - Become a mentor. christina.parra@afamilyforeverychild.org
- Questions? Ideas? Christy@afamilyforeverychild.org

How can you contact A Family For Every Child?
Call, email, or visit us online or in person!

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