

# Foster Focus

Volume 8 Issue 8 January 2019

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# 2019

# Now

# What?

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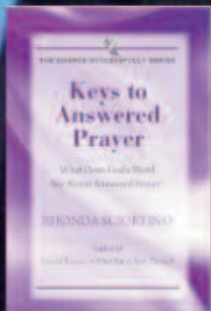
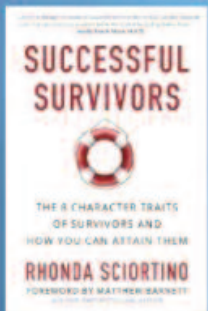
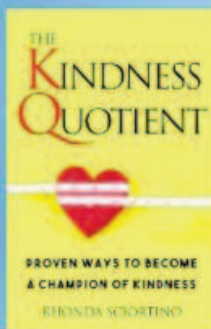
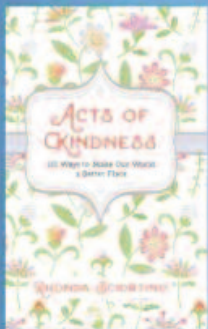
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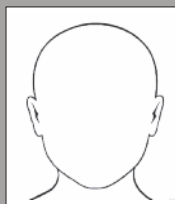
## This Issue's Contributors



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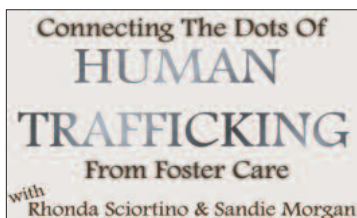
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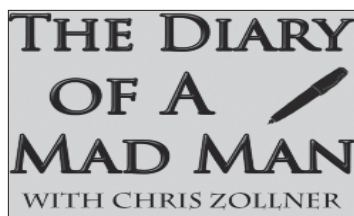
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**Foster Focus**  
An In-Depth Monthly Look at the Foster Care Industry

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*The views expressed by Columnists, Contributors and advertisers do not necessarily reflect the views of Foster Focus or Editor, Chris Chmielewski.*

# EDITOR'S NOTES

## In This Edition:

### Time to Get to Work



*Chris Chmielewski is the Creator, Owner and Editor of Foster Focus Magazine, America's only monthly foster care magazine. He spent five years in foster care before aging out. He created Foster Focus so that others in care would have the most up to date information. The magazine has consistently grown as Chris is entering his sixth year of the magazine. He has interviewed celebrities such as Maia Mitchell and Jimmy Graham. And writers from all over the country contribute articles to the magazine, making it one of the leading sources of foster care news and information in the country.*



This is the longest I've ever done a singular job.

I'm kind of a bad employee. I don't lack effort or focus, I just never saw the need for overkill, extra work. If I can do a task in a set amount of time, if done correctly, why should I waste more time on something? But jobs are full of meaningless tasks, it's part of those gigs. This gig is pretty cut and dry, but I've been doing it twice as long as I've held any job in my life. Eight years is an eternity for a guy like me.

Fact is, I love this job, but I've been doing it so long, I'm not sure how well of a job I'm doing.

Foster care faces a similar dilemma. We're reaching a threshold and we're not entirely sure we've been doing out job well.

Both foster care and I are both asking; What Now?

For me, it's all about figuring out what works. I need to be sure I've been putting my best foot forward. Are the columns all working? Should I change up the look and feel of the mag? Do I need more of this subject? What about that subject? Is that group being represented enough? What about that problem or issue, have I given it enough attention?

After 8 years, certain things run like clockwork. I know how to layout and pick stories in a timely matter. I know how to cater to the subscribers and advertisers I have. I know how to balance work and home life. There are areas that still need work. I still have trouble finding the right words to gain new advertisers. I still have trouble controlling the faucet that is subscribers. From the beginning, I have tempered my subscription pushes, as to not get overwhelmed. Sometimes I do too much, others, too little. I'll figure it out. The areas I fail in are vast, but if we're restricting our list, it's just a few. I don't spend enough time checking in on my writers and advertisers. They know, especially the Columnists, that this magazine is a 24/7 365 day a year kind of thing. I lose track of the little things I should be doing to make folks feel important. They are, I just let things fall through the cracks. I'm working on it. I also haven't managed to find the time to play with the look of the magazine. I want it to become fresher, more vibrant. The stories may occasionally be bleak, but the vehicle from which you get the story needn't be. So, I have areas to approve upon as I look out on another year as head of this thing. And foster care has some questions it's looking to answer too.

The first might be; where in the hell is the White House these last two years? The Obama Administration was a flurry of foster care related activity. Using that metaphor, the White House of today is a frozen tundra of inactivity. This isn't a politically motivated publication, it's an action-oriented publication. I have worked hard to keep politics out of these pages. Policy, legislation, testimonies, these are all fine, but the political bickering that has captured the nation stops at the cover of this magazine.

DHS is rightfully consumed by what's happening at the border, leading to a lack of information about much else. Only a handful of foster care related stories have bubbled up to the surface in the last couple years. The Family First Act was signed into law. That act changes how money is dispersed along with some other guidelines. There's also a developing trend of religious freedom bills popping up throughout the country. In essence, these bills allow agencies to turn away potential foster parents if their lifestyle choices don't line up with the agency. A few more states have raised their age-out ages and a few more have raised the age that former foster kids can receive medical insurance. Beyond of those stories, there hasn't been much movement, leading to more questions.

# Loading 2019

How do we remedy our glaring lack of foster parents? How do we continue the efforts to minimize group homes with that lack of homes weighing down on the system? Do we continue on the course we are on or do we switch things up and go after preventative measures that have been showing positive results? How do we address the inability to track a great deal of the kids in our care? What about oversight when the age out? What about life skills? What about reunification? What about keeping siblings together? How do we improve graduation numbers? How do we send more of our kids to college? Or the workforce? How do we curb our homeless numbers?

Now that I'm looking at it, I shouldn't complain so much. Others have much more on their plate than I have.

I've been at this long enough to make some educated guesses when looking out on a new year. I see this year playing out one of two ways. Either the trend of little movement continues or some of the new faces in the legislative branches will take us back to the days of action in the world of care.

I'll be here trying to bring you as much of it as I can however it plays out.

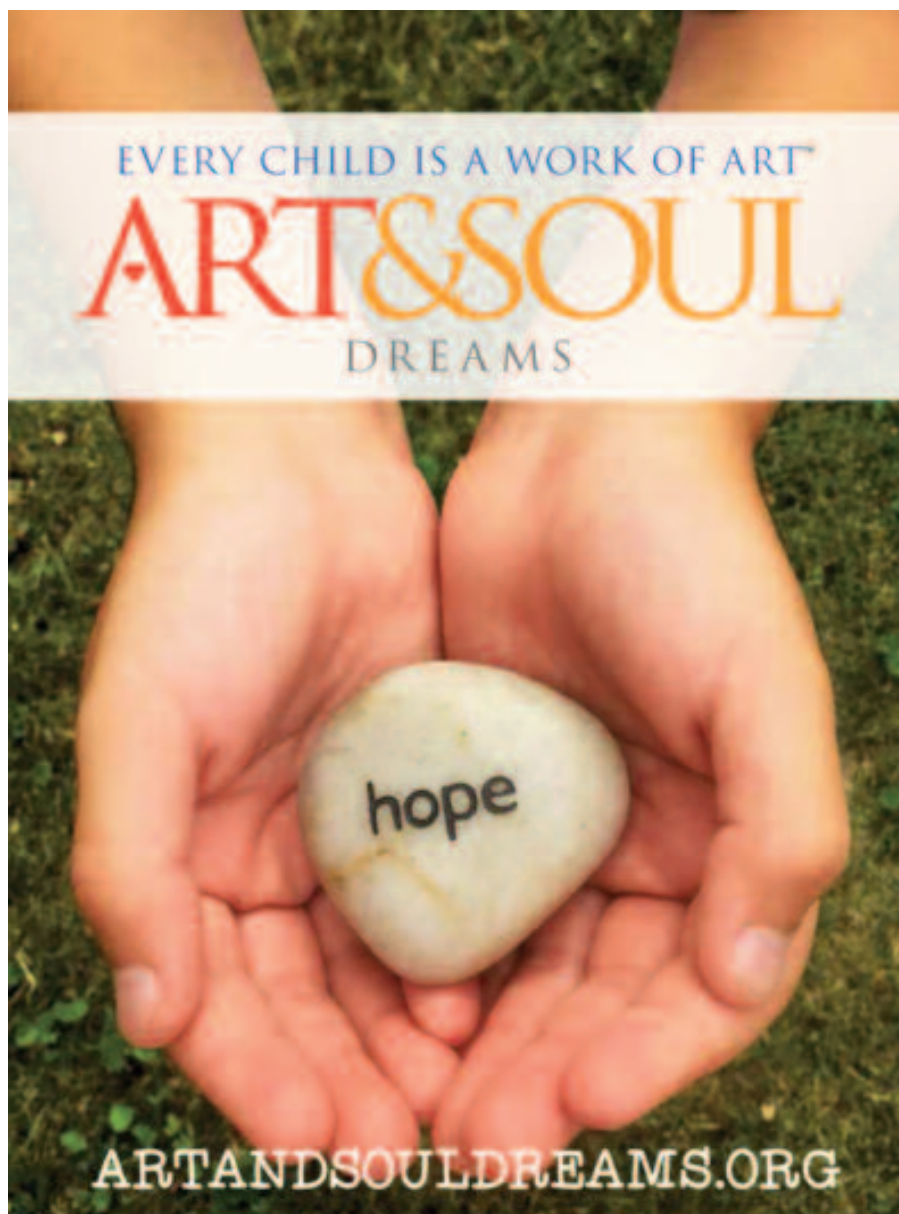
I'm going to make some efforts to bring you more of an understanding of the changes that are taking place. I'll bring in some experts to explain what it all means. It's times of inactivity that it becomes important to understand everything we have in place with more depth. I really enjoy the first hand account stories that I get to run, but exploring how some of these stories manifest is also important. Hey! Another area I can improve.

With so many questions lingering, it can be easy to feel a bit hopeless. How do we all come together for the betterment of the kids? I feel I can give you some hope in this regard. I have found that regardless of political climate, foster care is generally a bipartisan issue. In my experience, they put their differences aside for the kids. And sure, there are a lot of issues we need to face, but much like the magazine, if we break them down, go through them one at a time, we'll get where we need to be.

And with that run on sentence, I will lead you into the issue.

2019; Now What? We get to work, that's what.

# YOUTH *today*



Connecting The Dots Of  
**HUMAN**  
**TRAFFICKING**  
From Foster Care  
with  
Rhonda Sciortino & Sandie Morgan

**In This  
Edition:  
Inoculate Kids  
Against  
Traffickers**



*Rhonda Sciortino, author of **Succeed Because of What You've Been Through, Successful Survivors, and Kindness Quotient**, serves as a National spokesperson for Safe Families For Children, Royal Family Kids, and as national champion of the Love Is Action Community Initiative. Rhonda used the character traits and abilities developed throughout an abusive childhood to create successful businesses that protected and defended child welfare organizations. She is a passionate speaker, trainer, and advocate.*

**www.RHONDA.org**



***Dr. Sandie Morgan, Ph.D.**, is Director of Vanguard University's Global Center for Women and Justice, overseeing the Women's Studies Minor, as well as teaching Family Violence and Human Trafficking and producing the Ending Human Trafficking Podcast. Sandie's background as a Pediatric Nurse brought her into contact with her first victim of Commercial Sexual Exploitation of Children. She is committed to equipping our communities to be a safer place for vulnerable youth.*

**Live2Free.org**

Did you know that you can inoculate your kids against the lure of traffickers, against self-medicating, and against myriad other risky behaviors?

Young people in communities throughout the US are drawn into trafficking, drugs, and other risky behavior for many different reasons, including the practical issues of needing a place to stay and needing to earn money, but one of the most powerful "pull factors" is the primal need to be loved, valued, and to belong.

As demented as it may sound to us, many young trafficking victims willingly sell themselves to help support the household of their "boyfriend," who is actually their trafficker. They want to "do their fair share" to pay their way. Being raped for money multiple times a day, every day is painful—physically and emotionally. Enter the drugs. The trafficker "takes care of them" by giving them the drugs that make them feel better. Isn't that thoughtful?

Young people who feel that they belong to the "family" of the trafficker don't try to run away. They don't want to leave. They often go back to the trafficker even after they're rescued. Why? The feeling of belonging is a powerful magnet.

So what can be done? How can you change the kids you care about from the inside so that they value themselves and have the dignity and self-respect to take care of themselves, to not sell themselves or give themselves away in promiscuity, or to damage or even destroy themselves with drugs? The answer is in the inoculation.

The best inoculation against risky behavior and poor decisions is in filling the young people within your influence with love, value, and a strong sense of belonging.

To inoculate young people, create a three part plan to give them the love, value and belonging they need to defend against all the dangers they face. The first of the three part plan is to use all five love languages to clearly communicate to them that they are loved.

The five love languages (a term coined and written extensively on by Dr. Gary Chapman) are words of affirmation, acts of service, quality time, appropriate physical touch, and gift giving. Since we may not know the dominant love languages of young people, it's important that we put all five into action.



Give them words of encouragement that they are awesome and their future is bright. Do something for them. Just a simple act of leaving a piece of candy on their pillow or hiding a sweet note in their jacket pocket shows love. Sitting with the young person, making eye contact, and asking an open-ended question, and really listening (without interruption) to the answer will do wonders in making the young person feel valued and better understood. A gentle hand on a shoulder as they leave for school or holding pinkie fingers while watching a TV show of their choice can make them feel valued and connected. And lastly, gift giving doesn't have to be expensive, in fact, some of the best gifts are in giving them something you make for them or passing down something that has a sentimental value to you. Entrusting the young person with an heirloom can go a long way toward making the young person feel like a valued part of the family.

A strong sense of belonging can be accomplished with little things like whole-family pictures, matching t-shirts, pajamas, or socks for every member of the family. Another thing that can help solidify belonging is establishing traditions and including the kid as a main player in the tradition. For example, you can decide that every Tuesday is going to be "Taco Tuesday." Give the young person the responsibility of cooking the meat for the tacos or warming the tortillas or making homemade salsa. Whatever it is, make the kid feel important and valued. Compliment whatever he or she has done, and set aside that dinner hour as a time when everyone sits down to eat together with no phones or TV. You can alternate which member of the family chooses the music. Have fun with it, groaning with the music the kids choose, and letting the kids groan over the music the adults choose. You get the idea.

A quick note to those who would deny the kid the opportunity to participate because of bad behavior: never, ever deny the young person the opportunity to participate with family. To do so, is to invite the kid to seek comfort from a bad influence.

The family of a young person who is in the life of trafficking, would give any amount of money to rescue their child. But this inoculation of giving all five love languages, making eye contact, listening, and making kids feel valued and loved and as a precious part of your family costs nothing but can generate priceless results.

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# THE DIARY OF A MAD MAN

WITH CHRIS ZOLLNER

**In This  
Edition:**

**Jenna  
Meets  
Grandma**



*Mary and I were foster parents. Over a six-year period, we took in eighteen kids, all infants. Some stayed for months, others only a couple of days. Two of them are still part of our lives.*

*I started the process as a reluctant cynic, my wife began as a starry-eyed idealist, but we both adapted. Even if you think you've seen everything, foster care will open your eyes.*

*Diary of a Madman is an encouraging but honest tale that will help anyone interested in doing foster care.*

*It is divided into thirty-one fast-paced chapters. It begins when an intake worker drops a baby off at two in the morning. Chapter two describes the events leading up to our involvement in the Social Services System, and foreshadows the effect foster care will have on us. The next several chapters describe the roller coaster interaction between our family, the children, the system and the birth parents. The action culminates in a custody battle with a grandmother who exposed children to an alleged child molester. The book ends with an adoption. The memoir alternates gritty specifics and grim humor with moments of improbable triumph.*

*There are almost half a million children in foster care in the United States, yet the subject remains a literary desert.*

*This is Part IV of my novel, Jenna, about an eight-year-old girl from a dysfunctional home who is placed in foster care.*

*In past issues of Foster Focus, we published part of Jenna. Here is a quick synopsis:*

*Jenna is old before her time. From an early age she has had to fend for herself. She is the "adult" in her house. Her parents fluctuate between staying up for days and "crashing" for twenty-four hours or more at a time. One night Mom and Dad leave her alone and robbers break in the house. Jenna hides under the kitchen sink while they ransack the house. She attends school sporadically. Teachers and neighbors quiz her about her parents, but she has been coached and knows how to lie. When police arrive at the house, her parents make a scene. Her father blames Jenna. Jenna is placed in foster care with a loving but unconventional family. Her new teacher is concerned about her progress. Jenna misses her birth parents and wants to go back. Jenna gets help at school for her reading and goes for a supervised visit with her parents. She gets the wrong idea, thinking she will go home with Mom permanently and is disappointed when Dad doesn't show up. Jenna becomes attached to her teacher but doesn't want to interact with the other students. Miss Teak forces the issue and encourages Jenna to make friends and accept that she is not always in charge. In this passage, Jenna gets to meet her foster mother's mom.*

Miss Laurie and Jenna walked in the house and saw Mr. Dan standing in the front room wearing overalls and an old shirt and hat that made him look like he belonged back in time.

"Wow!" said Jenna. "Are you going to be in a play?"

He smiled, and it made him look less shy. He reached down into a bag and came out with a smaller outfit for her: overalls, a bright red shirt and a big, crumpled, floppy, straw hat. She tried to fit it on her head. It was a little big on her.

"Get changed, Jenna," said Miss Laurie.

Soon all three of them looked like farmers. Miss Laurie drove and Mr. Dan read a book. The car meandered up a thin, twisting, misty mountain road.

"I've never been in the mountains," Jenna said, looking out the back window, over the edges of the road and down into the valley below. She saw fog, fog and more fog, spreading out for miles. In the distance mountains and hills poked their way through the heavy, dreamy haze, like little islands in a sea of fog.

Mr. Dan and Miss Laurie made lots of comments about how wonderful everything was. Look how blue the sky is! No smog! Check out the trees, Jenna! Isn't this wonderful?

Jenna rolled her window up. The higher they drove, the chillier it got.

The turned off on a dirt road and drove up to a house made of logs. Abe Lincoln lived here, thought Jenna. They got out and Dan handed Jenna a blue jean jacket. She put it on and smiled.

"Does it fit?" asked Miss Laurie.

"Cozy," answered Jenna.

They walked inside, and a grey haired woman practically ran toward them. She was so tall. Taller than my Dad, thought Jenna. First, the lady hugged Laurie, then Dan. She bent down and stared Jenna in the eye. Her eyes twinkled a little.

"You must be the famous Jenna that I've heard so much about. My daughter speaks very highly of you."

Jenna started to smile, but she stopped herself. She glanced at Miss Laurie and the grey haired woman. "Is she your daughter?" Jenna asked.

The tall woman said, "Yes, Laurie is my daughter. And I want you to call me Grandma."

"My grandma's dead..." Jenna started to say.

"In this house I'm Grandma," she said proudly.

For a Grandma she sure looked young, except for the gray hair. "We better show you around while we still have some light outside," she said, leaping over a creek. Jenna ran and tried to jump the creek, but she didn't quite make it. She landed in about a foot of water with a splash. The lady smiled, took her hand and pulled her along. "You get wet a lot around here," she insisted.

Jenna glanced back at the creek. "Fishes!" she cried, pointing and jumping up and down. Tiny silver fish swam through the creek.

"Watch this," the gray-haired woman said with a smile. She bent down, cupped her hands and pounced down, scooping something out with her hands. One of the tiny fish flopped around like it was doing a crazy dance on this lady's fingers.

"Do you want to hold it?" she asked.

Jenna's eyes grew wide. She held out her hands, and the crazy woman dropped the fish into her palms. It squirmed around. Jenna got up really close. She wasn't used to animals, except maybe the crickets around the dark corners and cabinets. It felt just a little slimy, but that didn't bother Jenna. It had the beady eyes, and its fins looked so spiky.

"We better put it back in the creek," said the lady. "It won't survive out here in the open air."

Gently Jenna lowered the fish back down to the water. When she was an inch above the surface, the slippery creature did a backflip out of her hands and landed with a splash. It raced down the creek like a flash of silver.

Dan and Laurie were snuggled up on the couch. The gray haired lady and Jenna huddled up near the fireplace. The glow of the dying ashes was the only light in the room. Jenna wore her snowman pajamas, and the woman had sweatpants and a sweater with a guitar on it. She handed her a mug of hot chocolate that had been cooling off on the coffee table.

"Careful," she warned. "It's boiling."

Jenna gave Grandma her best I'm tough look, took a sip and jumped back, eyes wide open. "Wow!" said the girl. "That was hot. I should have listened." She took a second sip, this time much more slowly.

"What is your real name?" asked Jenna.

"Sandy."

"May I call you Sandy?"

"No. You may call me Grandma or Ma'am."

"May I call you Grandma Sandy?"

The grey haired woman smiled for a moment and said, "Yes."

"Thank you."

Grandma Sandy said, "Did you know Miss Laurie was adopted?"

"She's not your real daughter?" asked Jenna.

The woman raised her eyebrows. "Of course, she's real. Did you think Miss Laurie lived in your imagination?"

Jenna grinned as she glanced over at Miss Laurie who was leaning up against Mr. Dan's shoulder. Both of them had their eyes closed.

"But if she's not your real daughter..."

"She is my real daughter!" insisted Sandy. "She is adopted, and I love her just as much as I would if I gave birth to her."

"Miss Laurie is always painting the house," said Jenna.

Grandma Sandy chuckled a little and said, "She was always painting or drawing or making something. There was a store, Steed and Feed, that sold animal supplies, and they had the ugliest statue of a cowboy out front. The paint was chipped all over, but on the eyes it had washed off completely, leaving these odd black marks..."

"Black marks instead of eyes," laughed Jenna. "It must have looked like a zombie."

Sandy laughed some more and took a sip of cocoa. "That's exactly what people around town said, a cowboy zombie. Anyway, when they closed the store, the old man who owned it let Laurie have the statue. She wheeled it home on her red wagon. I almost choked when I looked out the front window and saw her wheeling that monster into the front yard."

"Did you make her take it back?" asked

Jenna.

Grandma Sandy sighed and got up. She gave Jenna a look and pointed to the backdoor with her thumb.

Grandma Sandy lifted the garage door, and it creaked, shuddered and shook its way up and open. Sandy aimed her flashlight. There in the center of the room, near an old pitchfork, was a larger than life cowboy, with blazing blue eyes and a huge hat.

"Help!" yelled Jenna before she could stop herself, but her cry turned into a laugh. "She painted that when she was a kid?"

Sandy put a hand on Jenna's shoulder. "Ummm... she was about two years older than you, but yes, she was still a kid."

Jenna walked forward a few hesitant steps and touched the cowboy's face. It was smooth, like it had just been painted yesterday. Jenna muttered, "I bet it comes alive at night, and ropes cattle or whatever cowboys do."

Jenna pried her eyes away from the statue and stared at Grandma Sandy. "Did Laurie get in trouble a lot when she was my age?" Grandma Sandy's eyebrows rose up. "No more than usual," she answered. "She did have that fire in her eyes that some ornery little girls have."

"Orn-er-ee?" asked Jenna. "Does that mean she was bad?"

"No," said Grandma. "It means she was tough. When she needed to be." Grandma reached down and tickled Jenna's chin for half a second and added, "Like somebody else I know."

Jenna followed Grandma Sandy back inside, watching the trail, by the flickering flame of the flashlight.

When they got back to Miss Laurie's house, Jenna couldn't help it. Whenever the phone rang, she asked, "Is it Grandma Sandy? Can I talk to her?"

"Just a minute," Laurie would answer.

"You'll get your chance." Miss Laurie would speak to Grandma Sandy and Jenna would squirm until she got her turn to talk.

# Family Finding

W Richard Villasana

## In This Edition: Problems in Texas



**Richard Villasana**, a proud Navy veteran, is a leading international authority on reuniting children in U.S. foster care with their relatives.

Villasana is an author and international speaker who has been featured by the San Diego Business Journal, the Union-Tribune Radio Network show, San Diego Finest Business Radio, and EFE, the world's largest Spanish language media company.

He is the founder of Forever Homes for Foster Kids. For more than 20 years, the organization has been building stronger families and communities by locating relatives of foster children so they can move out of foster care into forever homes.

Forever Homes for Foster Kids has handled foster care cases for several agencies and nonprofits including Casey Family Programs, Seneca Center and CASA of Travis County in Texas.

Villasana's insights on locating families have been taught to social workers around the country. He specializes in cross-cultural and "family finding" training for universities, social service agencies and nonprofits. To have Villasana speak to your company, school or association, email him at [info@ForeverHomesforFosterKids.org](mailto:info@ForeverHomesforFosterKids.org).

Visit [www.ForeverHomesforFosterKids.org](http://www.ForeverHomesforFosterKids.org) to become part of the growing number of supporters of foster children because every child deserves a forever home and a happier, healthier life.

Contact Richard via email at [rvillasana@FindFamiliesInMexico.org](mailto:rvillasana@FindFamiliesInMexico.org)

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### *Foster Children Struggle in Texas, Accountability Lacking*

The holiday season is here. Hanukkah has already started, and Christmas is just around the corner. As always, I like to take this opportunity to review a couple of topics that have caused controversy this year as well as look for signs of hope for better outcomes for our foster children.

With regard to abysmal lapses in child care and protection, Texas still ranks as one of the states with the worst track record in the care of foster children. More than 12,000 children are in long-term state foster care. Unfortunately, the more time a child spends in foster care, the greater their risk of abuse. Nearly 18% of children who come into the foster care system do so because of abuse. But once in foster care, children are abused at a much higher rate of nearly 33%. And when foster kids hit age thirteen, their chances of leaving the system by adoption drops to nearly 1%, meaning that thousands of Texas foster children will be calling state institutions and group facilities home for many years.

Texas is now marking the three year anniversary when U.S. District Judge Janis Graham Jack became involved with overseeing the Texas foster care system after a scathing report highlighted several areas that negatively impact the safety and well-being of the state's foster children. The number of child deaths that occur in Texas are staggering. In 2016, 207 children died in Texas, making the state the leader in child deaths. The majority of children were either under the care of Texas CPS (Child Protective Services) or had some record with CPS at the time of their death.

Other issues involve deceitful practices that tear families apart. Less than a month ago, a Houston CPS worker and his supervisor were found guilty of taking two children from their parents – a two-year-old daughter and five-month-old son -- through lies and deceit. Sadly, the daughter was abused while in foster care. The damages awarded to the parents were \$127,000, the largest such award ever in Texas. The amount could have been greater except that the judge didn't want to overload Texas tax payers, who will essentially be footing the bill. The parents' attorney, Stephanie Powell, said, "It's an unfortunate epidemic and until someone like Judge Schneider makes CPS accountable, it's going to continue."

Other serious deficiencies within Texas CPS include the use of visitation workers to supplement work performed by trained CPS staff. According to the Nov. 21, 2018 article by Robert T. Garrett of The Dallas Morning News, Texas has contracts with about 100 non-full-fledged CPS caseworkers. These workers were hired to check on remotely placed foster kids. Although someone is visiting the children, these visits are essentially a token effort to say that someone saw that the child was alive. Judge Jack wrote, "Children don't feel comfortable sharing their problems with the rotating roster of 'I See You' workers, who often fail to meet with them in private as required. 'I See You' workers are clearly not equipped to be caseworkers." These workers were never part of the court process or planning for the outcome of the child.

Fortunately, there is reason to have hope of change. U.S. District Judge Janis Graham Jack just issued a ruling that will pressure Texas to investigate the services at the many private agencies that care for thousands of foster kids. The judge's ruling also mandates the cessation of the 'I See You' visitation workers within the next six months.

One of the key problems in foster care nationally is the lack of accountability for agencies. This dilemma with accountability permeates every aspect of foster care. #FamilyFirst was a popular hashtag on social media this year, and many legislators across the country pushed for new laws that would put more focus on keeping families together. Apparently CPS didn't get the memo.

My non-profit, Forever Homes for Foster Kids, specializes in international family finding, the mandated activity to identify, locate, and notify parents and other adult family members when their child relative is placed in foster care. We experienced a very disturbing case this year where a California foster child wrote us directly and asked us to find his father who lives in Mexico. Although we offered to do the work pro bono for the agency, we were not supplied with the necessary information to perform the family finding. After some time, we were able to reach the supervisor, who decided that the agency

would not move forward with the case. The result of that decision is that this child's father most likely will never be notified. Without specialized assistance, the child will also most likely age out with no connection to his father.

Let's look at the lack of accountability in this matter. This child was discriminated against because his father lives outside the U.S. If his father lived in Maine, a distance of more than 3,000 miles, efforts would have been made to find him.

However, this child is disenfranchised by not receiving the same effort to locate and notify his father, who lives outside the U.S. yet perhaps may be as close as five miles south of San Diego.

Maybe you're wondering, "Why should tax dollars go to pay for family finding since the parent is outside the U.S.?" One excellent reason is that an appeals court could overturn a Termination of Parental Rights (TPR), or a subsequent adoption of this child. This is exactly what happened in a recent case. The Texas Appellate Court reversed a TPR on the grounds that the father, who lives in Mexico, had not been properly served notice of the state's intent

to terminate his parental rights. Imagine the thousands of dollars wasted by both CPS and the Court in conducting a TPR that now has to be retried at additional expense to CPS and the Court. The difference in cost between conducting the mandated family finding and the court costs incurred are significant.

Is anyone in foster care going to lose their job over these decisions and inappropriate actions? Definitely not! Neither of the two staff members in the Texas case above that will cost the state \$127,000 have lost their jobs. The supervisor in the northern California county is still employed despite violating a foster child's civil rights. One of the reasons for a lack of penalties is that while family finding is mandated under the Fostering Connections Act of 2008, there are no rules regarding the execution of family finding. Without any rules, there can be no criminal charges or penalties. Without repercussions for bad acts, there really is no accountability, not unless a judge steps in, as U.S. District Judge Janis Graham Jack has. But these occurrences are few and far between.

The way to a better, brighter year for foster children is for lawmakers to step up and

make the necessary changes so that accountability is part of foster care. Texas State Sen. Judith Zaffirini is quoted as saying, "Our children are our most precious resource and ensuring their safety should be a top priority for the Legislature." The Texas state government can also take steps to embrace many of the proposed changes to its foster care system, so that foster kids are better protected and fewer die under the watch of CPS.

I hope you will take time to reflect on the good that has occurred in your life this year.

We all have something for which to be thankful, although sometimes it takes effort to identify what that could be. There are millions of caring, dedicated people working for and pulling for foster children.

Together, we can do more to make 2019 the year when fewer children enter foster care, family finding becomes more widespread, and the process more thorough -- resulting in more foster kids being placed with family members. That would be a wonderful gift to give to tens of thousands of foster children for the holidays and years beyond.



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## She Loves Them (As Long As She Can)

She opens up her home  
to the abandoned and abused.  
She takes the time to care  
knowing she's being used.  
In an imperfect system,

she does what she can do.  
She fosters their little souls  
when no one else wants to.  
She's a mother's mother,

she's a woman's woman.  
Knowing the facts at hand,  
she loves them as long as she can.  
Half a million young souls  
are in the system every year.  
And in this our America,  
they've only known abuse and fear.

Some find an adopted home,  
some fall through the cracks.  
Some simply age out,  
those are the cold hard facts.  
Some might say she's a saint,  
some may say she's a fool.  
But, I think she's an angel  
living by the golden rule.

by **Jordan Blake Michiels**

*Jordan Blake Michiels is a writer and poet who lives in Daytona Beach Florida. He has a passion for inspiring and motivating people to believe in themselves. You can find 25 music videos on YouTube that are family oriented. You can also find articles and more poems on LinkedIn.*  
[www.linkedin.com/in/jordan-blake-michiels/](http://www.linkedin.com/in/jordan-blake-michiels/)

### **History of the poem:**

*A friend of mine has an aunt who is a foster mother. She was always talking about how she would get a new child and how she never knew how long they would be with her. But she always opened up her home and her heart to these little ones who needed care. She had adopted several children and continued to love the ones who cycled through her home always grieving when they would go. I have lost contact and so no names are provided.*

*I have sat on the poem for awhile not knowing how to get it out there. However, through work and church, I have become friends with former foster kids and through their stories have become aware of how important this calling is and I decided it was time to release the poem hoping it would honor, inspire and perhaps motivate others to become foster parents.*

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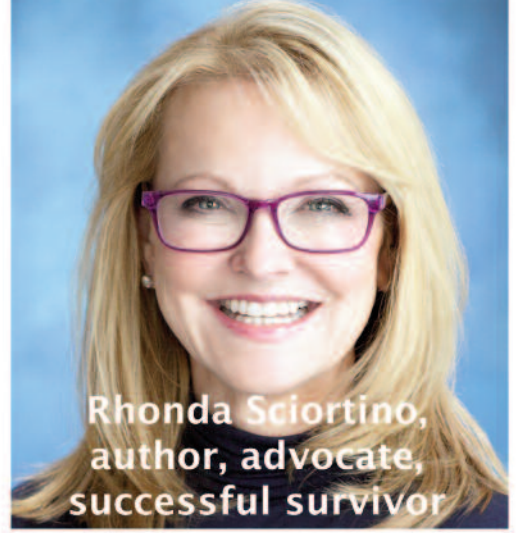
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# Collateral Damage

By **Katie Powner**

*Foster Focus Contributor*

He had big, blue eyes and a floppy mop of dirty blonde hair. I'll call him M. He wore a bulldozer t-shirt and his heart on his sleeve as his foster dad knelt in front of him and put his hands on the little guy's shoulders.

"I'll be back tomorrow," foster dad said. "Be a good boy."

We had volunteered to take 3-year-old M for the weekend so his foster parents could get a much-needed, long-overdue break. Only another licensed foster family could take him overnight, and we didn't currently have a placement so we figured we could help. "We can handle anything for one night," my husband and I had said to ourselves.

The fear and confusion in M's heart was almost palpable. Only two days before, he had had his first overnight visit with his bio mom since entering foster care, and now the foster parents he'd been living with for six months had left him with complete strangers. How's a 3-year-old with developmental delays and a history of trauma supposed to deal with that?

M only knew one way to cope. He spit, and screamed, and banged his head against the floor. He threw toys, and clawed at my skin, and banged his head against my face. He cried, and cried, and cried. I still have marks on my arm from his fingernails.

"We can handle anything for one night, right?" We said it with a little less bravado now, but no less assurance. We were in it together. This is what we'd trained for, prepared for, braced ourselves for. It was only one night. But our three kids were less sure. "How much longer until he leaves?" they wondered. Were we being unfair, asking this of them? Sure, it was only one night, but how much could they take? Should they take?

It didn't take long to realize our plan to give M the extra bed in the boys' room wasn't going to work. He would have to sleep in our bed. Thankfully, because he had refused to nap and had thoroughly exhausted himself during the day, he let me tuck him in and read him a story. He went right to sleep.

We put our kids to bed, too. Then we pulled the futon mattress up from the basement and dropped it with a thud in the middle of our tiny living room. It took up most of the floor. Light from the streetlamp on the corner poured in through the window as I tossed and turned on the mattress and tried to push back my fear that M would wake up in the middle of the night and tear our bedroom to pieces. I didn't get much sleep.

The next day was much the same. He chewed on toys, tested every boundary he could find, and ripped up the seat cover of the vintage red stool in my kitchen. My favorite stool. I studied the damage done and wondered if it was a physical representation of not only the internal damage that's been done to vulnerable kids like M, but also the damage kids like M unwittingly cause to others. To my own kids even. Collateral damage.

When he left, everyone heaved a sigh of relief. I won't sugarcoat it - it was hard. But as we sat down with our kids afterward to thank them for their patience, tell them we love them, and discuss with them why M acted the way he did and why we had offered to watch him for the weekend, I thought about their futures. How would they remember this experience?

Will they look back someday and think it was a crazy thing, what we did? A foolish thing? Thoughtless? After all, we allowed M to invade their space, wreck their toys, and compromise their peace without their consent. They had to make sacrifices they didn't choose. Endure a trial they didn't ask for. Just like every time we take a placement.

Will these foster care experiences cause our kids to grow bitter? Will they resent being collateral damage? I don't know. Maybe. Or maybe they will have more compassion for others and more thankfulness for their many blessings, and face the challenges in their lives with more determination, a lot more grace, and the willingness to say, "We can handle anything for one night, right?"



*Katie Powner lives in rural Montana where cows still outnumber people. She has worked alongside her husband in youth ministry for over a decade and is a mom to the third power: biological, adoptive, and foster. She blogs about family in all its many forms at [www.katiepowner.blogspot.com](http://www.katiepowner.blogspot.com).*

## **FOSTER CARE SHOULDN'T START IN A CUBICLE.**

Since the beginning of foster care, children have been removed from their homes and left to sit in sterile government buildings while their caseworker searches for a suitable foster home. The children sit and wait, over hearing caseworkers describe their 'situation' to potential foster parents. This often magnifies their removal trauma and increases the risk of future trauma. Some children wait over 4 hours to be placed in a foster home.

## **THEY NEED A BETTER PLACE.**



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# Adopting a Child in the Foster Care System: What to Expect

By **Heather Hernandez**  
*Foster Focus Contributor*

Foster parenting is hard work. Taking in a child that does not have a stable background can bring with it a host of challenges. Foster children require special care, plenty of love, and consistency that allows them to let their guard down.

Foster child adoption is growing steadily. It makes sense for a foster family to have first rights to adoption once a child becomes free to adopt. This is especially true if the child and the foster parents have had the opportunity to form strong attachments to one another.

While daily life might not change for foster parents and child who is newly adopted, there are some things that you might want to know as you embark on a more permanent road to a loving relationship. Here are some things to consider as you adopt a foster child:

## **1. There will be no more social welfare checkups.**

Once the adoption has been finalized, there is no need for social services to continue to monitor your household happenings, as the child is now legally your responsibility. As such, it is imperative that you continue to provide a consistent and loving home for the child, as there may be some feelings of grief or loss over what could not be with his or her biological parents. Be patient and understanding that there may be a time of adjustment as they learn to deal with their new permanent situation.

## **2. You get to make all of the decisions regarding care.**

As you now have legal responsibility for this child, you are charged with making all decisions pertaining to care. Medical treatment, school attendance, and even religious practice will become your responsibility as you navigate the permanence of parenting. If you lack confidence in making these decisions, keep in mind that your child is dependent on you for care, consistency, and love - things they may not have received in the presence of anyone else. You are their rock.

## **3. You are responsible for welfare, and liable for legal issues.**

If you have adopted a child who has had trouble with the law before, it might be beneficial that you know you are now legally responsible for all actions incurred while the child is in your care. Any offenses committed as a minor will be on your plate, and you must work to resolve any issues and disputes that may arise. Parenting is, at times, frustrating and demanding work, requiring a great deal of patience and resolve. Keep your chin up, and hold in your mind the thought that you are making a big difference in the life of this young one. Don't give up.

## **4. You may be in for an emotional roller coaster.**

This child has experienced trauma and loss, which will be difficult to let go of as they begin to heal in your family. They will likely experience many strong emotions as they are torn between wanting what can't be and accepting and coming to love what has transpired in their life. Learning to be a sympathetic ear and a firm hand of discipline will be the best thing that you can do for your child as they learn to be a member of your family.

## **5. The buck stops with you.**

Many foster parents are initially trepidatious as they begin to find their footing with discipline. As you form a relationship with this child, don't be afraid to let them know who's boss. You need the hierarchal structure, and so do they. Let them know that there are consequences for certain behaviors, and that you put systems in place because ultimately, you want success for them.

Foster child adoption is not easy, but it is extremely rewarding to make a difference in the life of a child. If you are looking to adopt a foster child, go into this relationship with your eyes and heart wide open, and you will find your way. Best of luck to you as you prepare for this amazing journey!



# YOUR SON HAS ASKED A CALCULUS QUESTION YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND AT ALL

---

**Do you:**

- (A) Create a diversion.**
- (B) Look up the answer on your phone but pretend you knew it.**
- (C) Hire a tutor. For yourself.**

When it comes to being a parent, there are no perfect answers – just being there is enough. So don't worry, you don't have to be perfect to be a perfect parent. There are thousands of teens in foster care who will love you just the same.



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# Teaching Children to Manage Finances

By **Diana Thompson**  
*Foster Focus Contributor*

Money is something everyone needs, wants and dreams about. Alas, it is far too often misunderstood. It can bring out the best or the worst in people, and although it facilitates some of the greatest philanthropic and humanitarian efforts we see, it is sadly also the bases for some of the most horrific acts imaginable. How can we teach fostered and vulnerable populations not only about money and financial stability, but also how to create and maintain a sustainable lifestyle circled around personal, professional and financial success? Creating the solution to this plight has become the personal mission of Diana Thompson, CEO of Student Finance League (“SFL”).

It is difficult for most adults - let alone young people - to figure out how to maximize income, pay bills, build credit, save money and avoid frauds and scams. For those most vulnerable and displaced like youth in the foster system, this can be even more challenging. Where there is a lack of money, limited earning potential and scarce opportunities, these youth are constantly living in survival mode. This state of basic survival is where these youth become vulnerable to inconceivable things, where the worst can happen. Children and young adults involved in the foster system have many more obstacles to overcome in this respect, then a child with two gainfully employed and financially stable parents whom impart their knowledge on to the next generation.

After four years and 16000 students working through Diana’s program, the research collected and case studies that were analyzed concluded that there is no shortage of financial literacy efforts, but yet there is a

clear language barrier and lack of confidence. So much time, effort and tax-payer capital is continually allocated toward helping those in and aging out of the foster system, yet the stats show that the number of those who experience struggle, danger, victimization and poverty clearly suggests the model needs to be refocused and as such, parameters need to be redefined.

Student Finance League is a designated 501(c)(3) which partners with organizations, shelters, schools, law-enforcement and federal agencies to host workshops and seminars that teach money, business and life skills. The predominant focus is on business and financial language, vocabulary, conversations and confidence. By leveraging students’ strengths, goals and abilities SFL promotes equality, stability and opportunity. It all started as an after-school program for low income youth and has expanded to adult and child victims of human trafficking, along with special needs, fostered, homeless, abused, low-moderate income, at-risk, rehab/recovery, refugee, underserved, jail/juvenile, veteran and all other vulnerable members within the community. The financial services industry spends \$5.5 billion annually on marketing products and services and \$670 million on financial literacy, yet the poverty line has grown 2% over the last 20 years, consumer debt is at an all-time high, student debt is at an all time high. 24.5 million households are underbanked and 9 million households non-banked. This does not support a positive effect considering the money, efforts, initiatives and attempts dedicated to helping these underserved communities financially. Understanding budgeting and credit building are of utmost importance, but just like learning to speak

English or Spanish, it is only meaningful if it is actually understood. Just like learning a foreign language, the basics have to come first. It does not matter how simply and slowly the teachers speak, if the basic terminology is not developed in a way that the students are able to comprehend and fully understand what they are learning, there will never be an effective long-term impact.

The SFL program is the bridge between financial professionals and the community. It serves to create more interest, better traction, understanding of finance, and is a win-win for both the user and the financial institutions. It starts a mutually beneficial dialogue that connects the two to create bankable and employable taxpayers for the institutions, while providing opportunity for the user to become financially proficient and stable. The program teaches the language and vocabulary on the topics of banking, debt, credit, loans, college/education, housing/real estate, tax, accounting, investing, retirement, marketing, sales, professionalism, business, entrepreneurship, interviewing, resumes, legal, insurance, fraud and scams, budgeting, and sustainable maintenance of all of the above. SFL is not aiming to teach students how to become experts in all industries, yet how to do research, build confidence and learn how to communicate in a professional manner.

The program is taught not just by local professionals, but by students who have completed the program and now have the ability to earn consistent and legal income. Leading by example allows these student-turned-teachers to achieve a better connection and more significant impact and trac-

tion with new like-minded students. Before trying to accomplish life milestones, there is a language - conversations and industry jargon that must be developed, understood and utilized effectively before any productive navigation of the business world can occur.

Most children and youth that have been through the program have made it very clear - their failures, procrastinations and weaknesses were not due to stupidity, laziness or inability. They simply did not understand the language and felt overwhelmed and inadequate in the conversation. Everyone can relate to this! Imagine going to China and trying to establish yourself with everyone around you speaking a different language that you don't understand! This is exactly what is happening in America.

Money and business are a language, and professionals jump straight to the concepts and execution without ensuring the audience understands the basic language first. This disconnect has students checking out before they've even checked in.

Anyone who works in and around the foster system is well aware of the risks that this population is faced with, and the increased risk of falling victim to crime, including but not limited to human trafficking and violence. The participants that have gone through the SFL program, regardless of socioeconomic status, race, age, ability level or goals, all have the same thing in common: they are struggling financially. This is not because they are less intelligent, negligent or ignorant. This is because no one has taught them the language of money or has taken the time to build their confidence around the subject matter. From the research conducted, countless banks and

professionals make a wonderful effort to promote financial literacy within their communities, but the glaring problem is the knowledge gap is far too wide. Not to mention the disconnect that the audience experiences when a banker with \$2000 cuff links is lecturing them on budgeting! Diana Thompson, through her efforts as CEO of Student Finance League, is broadening the organization's efforts to help not just the children and youth in or aging out of foster care, but the educators within the system as well. Student Finance League has been focused on teaching victims of human trafficking and violence (or those at risk to becoming victimized) be better informed, financially stable and independent in an effort to improve earning ability, money management skills and overall long-term sustainability. Sadly, all too often the story starts in the foster system. Many of the victims and distressed participants serviced by SFL admit to a lack of financial education, and money is the main reason for their situations. Hunting for money and love without stability or compassion is a dangerous combination.

This program can partner with any organization, shelter or group, adding the seminars and workshops to teach these crucial skills. If someone is able to learn a language, they can start learning the language of money. Personally, as a victim of domestic violence and working with many fellow victims, the most important and impactful lesson is - SUCCESS IS THE BIGGEST REWARD! In ten years from now, having a great home, secured income, retirement account and no bad debt, life will be happy, safe and stable. Being born into misfortune is not your choice, living the rest of your life content and happy IS!



**Diana Thompson** CEO/Founder Student Finance League Inc Diana created the Student Finance League. Born in Canada, Diana obtained a degree in Marketing and Advertising at the age of 20 and has lived and worked in 35 countries over the past ten years. Her work experience includes Global Head of Marketing for an IT company, International Public Relations, Marketing and Sales. Diana launched an elite private members club in London, UK, created a successful partnership with Formula One and was a finalist in Miss World Canada, World Fitness Show and Miss Grand Prix. Diana is a member of the United Nations Association, South Florida Trafficking Task Force, New York State Anti-Trafficking Coalition, Broward Human Trafficking Task Force, Palm Beach Trafficking Coalition, featured on CBS, acknowledged by Senator Marco Rubio for work in identifying, preventing and treating trafficking using a financial model. Additionally, she has been invited by senators to help pass new Bills related to Human Trafficking and Domestic Violence.

SFL is looking for individuals, foundations, organizations and homes to partner with financially to have a bigger and more effective footprint!!!!



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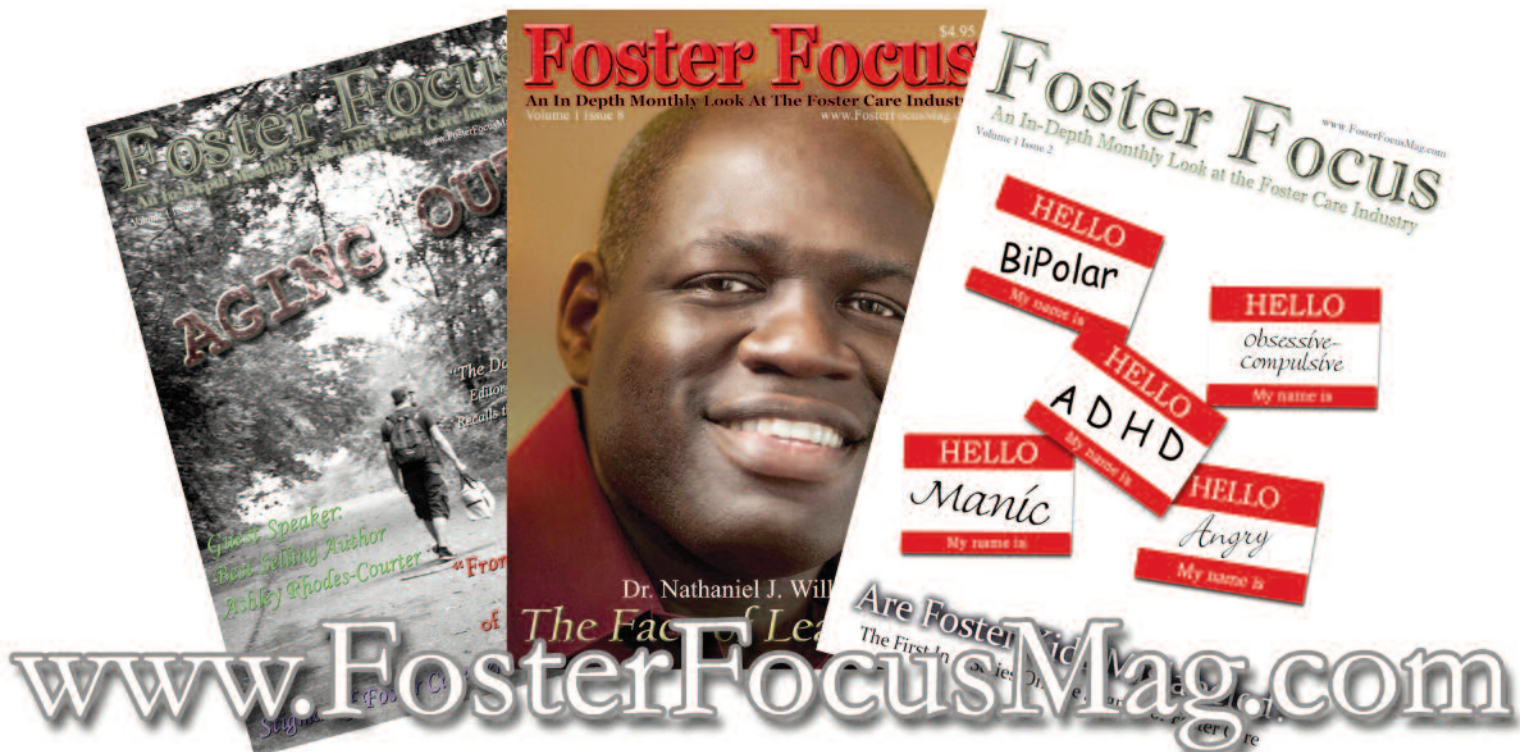
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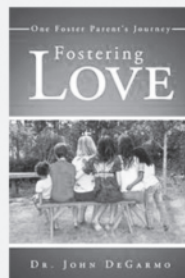
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# Dr. John DeGarmo

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## Lisa Aguirre

Lisa Aguirre grew up in a small town in Maryland but travelled all over the world in her work for many years in public service at the U.S. State department. More recently, she transferred to the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services and enjoys this work. She holds a master's degree in clinical psychology and a law degree from Tulsa University. She is married to Wilde with five adult children and one grandchild. She is determined to do what she can, not only to mentor and support, but also to advocate for older teens and young adults in foster care.



*Faces of Foster Care* has heartfelt and frank messages from twenty people around the country who have been involved in some way with foster care. Their stories are like mini memoirs, so inspiring and sometimes heartbreaking. All profits from the book go directly back into the organization for which the author volunteers and is a board member, the DC Family and Youth Initiative (dcfyi.org).

Please support this work and foster care by ordering a copy and learn from this incredible window into foster care in the U.S.

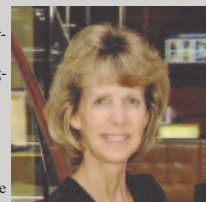
Carl Hancock Rux, author of the novel *Asphalt* (Simon & Schuster) and alumni of the NYC Foster Care System reviewed *Faces of Foster Care*: "No child thrives without a sense of place, identity, or familial nurturing. In the mid-19th century, over 30,000 children lived on the streets of New York City, facing the harsh elements of homelessness without public or private assistance. The initial campaign to extend benefits to, and provide families for displaced children (then known as 'The Orphan Train Movement') eventually morphed into a bureaucratic agency constantly entrenched with all manner of budgetary constraints, agency mandates, policy changes and revisionist statutes.



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## Ellen Fannon

Award winning author, Ellen Fannon, is a practicing veterinarian, former missionary, and church pianist/organist. She originated and wrote the Pet Peeves column for the Northwest Florida Daily News before taking a two-year assignment with the Southern Baptist International Mission Board. She and her husband have also been foster parents for more than 40 children, and the adoptive parents of two sons. Her first novel, *Other People's Children*, the humorous account of the life of a foster parent, was released last November and is available at Amazon, Barnes and Noble, and the trunk of her car. She lives in Valparaiso with her husband, son, and assorted pets.



"Why are children so childish?" Robin groused to herself as she sat valiantly attempting to put two coherent thoughts together for her newspaper column that was due tomorrow. But every time she had an idea, it disappeared through the leaky sieve of her brain before she could formulate it into meaningful words on her computer screen. Her powers of concentration were becoming increasingly more difficult due to the continuous racket of yelling, slamming, stomping, and arguing threatening to tear the house apart. Tuning it out had not worked. Nor had ignoring it—and she was becoming concerned about what she would find beyond her office door.

Muttering under her breath, she threw open the door and ventured forth into the fray. God give me patience and give it to me now!

Of course. They were arguing about the fly swatter. There were only two million, five-hundred thousand, six hundred and seventy four (give or take) assorted toys of every shape, size, color, and model in the playroom...

[ellenfannonauthor.com](http://ellenfannonauthor.com)



[garbagebagsuitcase.com](http://garbagebagsuitcase.com)



amazon.com

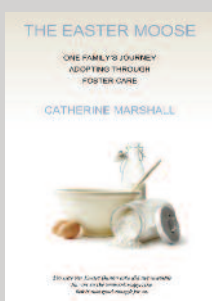
## Shenandoah Chefalo

Shenandoah Chefalo is a graduate of Michigan State University, holding a Bachelor of Arts with a Major in Interdisciplinary Studies in Social Science, a Core Essentials Graduate from Coach U, and a member of the Foster Leaders Movement. She is a sought after speaker on topics surrounding youth in foster care, and has been featured as a guest locally, nationally and internationally.



She is also a survivor and alumni of the foster care system. Shenandoah Chefalo is also the author of *Garbage Bag Suitcase* about her time before, during and after foster care as well as her current advocacy work. She also wrote an e-book entitled *Setting Your Vision and Defining Your Goals*, and is also working on her next manuscript, *Hiking for Stillness*.

*Garbage Bag Suitcase* is the true story of Shenandoah Chefalo's wholly dysfunctional journey through a childhood with neglectful, drug-and alcohol addicted parents. She endured numerous moves in the middle of the night with just minutes to pack, multiple changes in schools, hunger, cruelty, and loneliness. Finally at the age of 13, Shen had had enough. After being abandoned by her mother, she asked to be put into foster care. Surely she would fare better at a stable home than living with her mother? It turns out that this was not the storybook ending she had hoped for. With foster parents more interested in the income received by housing a foster child, Shen was once again neglected emotionally. The money she earned working at the local grocery store was taken by her foster parents to "cover her expenses." When a car accident lands her in the hospital with grave injuries and no one comes to visit her during her three week stay, she realizes she is truly all alone in the world.



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## Catherine Marshall

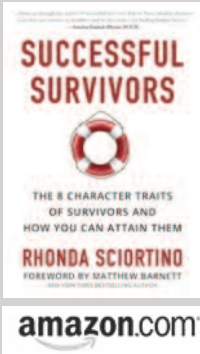
Catherine Marshall's stories about parenting and other real life adventures have been featured in several anthologies and magazines including the *Noyo River Review*, *Foster Families Today*, and *Tales of Our Lives*.



She resides in the San Francisco Bay Area and Mendocino, where she has a consulting practice specializing in helping nonprofits and community groups effect social change. She is the author of *Field Building: Your Blueprint for Creating an Effective and Powerful Social Movement*.

Catherine Marshall's story reveals the heartbreak and hope of foster parenting. Thirty-eight and newly married, Catherine yearned to be a mother and adoption seemed a viable option. The county's Foster-Adopt Program was affordable, so she and her new husband were confident they could adopt and parent two siblings. But nothing was as it seemed. The birth parents used intimidation and the court system to sabotage the adoption. The social services agency wavered in its support. Even the children, three-year old Jenny and six-year old Robert, were unaware of the ticking time bomb of genetics and early neglect that would detonate in their teens.

Would the family survive intact? Would the marriage withstand the stress? Would the children overcome the same afflictions and addictions that had plagued their birth parents? *The Easter Moose: One Family's Journey Adopting through Foster Care* provides all parents, but particularly those adopting, fostering, or caring for children with challenges, the assurance they are not alone. Social workers, teachers, people who work in the family court system, and anyone who believes in nurture over nature will get a reality check.



## Rhonda Sciortino

At age 15 Rhonda decided to seek emancipation. One of the prerequisites was that Rhonda have a job, so she went to work for the first person who would hire her—an insurance agent.



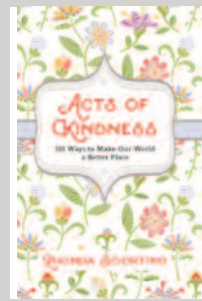
When her employer explained the concept of insurance, Rhonda learned everything she could about insurance. Despite being denied again and again, Rhonda repeatedly petitioned the Insurance Commissioner to allow her to sit for the insurance agent exam even though she wasn't yet 18. An exception was finally granted, and Rhonda became California's youngest licensed insurance agent at 17.

Survivors of childhood abuse are some of the strongest, most talent, most resourceful people you'll ever meet. In fact, the more painful the mistreatment they've survived, the more significant the character traits and learned abilities they've developed!

Successful Survivors -- The 8 character Traits and How You Can Develop Them includes story after story of people who exemplify the character traits that are exactly what survivors of trauma need to create successful lives. The great news is that these character traits and abilities can be developed in all of us and can be used to create personal and professional success.

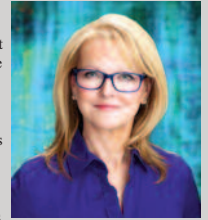
The challenge is that survivors of trauma often don't know about those assets until someone recognizes and celebrates them. If you know someone who hasn't yet discovered and unleashed their powerful character traits, give them **SUCCESSFUL SURVIVORS**.

[rhonda.org](http://rhonda.org)



## Rhonda Sciortino

Acts of Kindness, small or large, help everyone make their world a kinder place. Through the simplest act of kindness, all of our lives are improved. Genuine caring is best expressed through encouraging and helping others. Kindness fills the emotional "fuel tank" of others as well as ourselves. This book gives simple suggestions for connecting with others, which is the powerful undercurrent of kindness.



Good foster care is a profound act of Kindness that can literally change the trajectory of a child's life. Everyone isn't equipped to be a foster parent, but everyone can be kind.

Kindness isn't complicated or costly, but it can have meaningful, measurable effects in the lives of both the giver and the recipient. Imagine the exponential impact of Kindness in the lives of everyone you know. Kindness can make Grouchy people friendlier, withdrawn people open up, and lead depressed people to begin to believe that happiness is possible.

Let's spark positive change in our families, workplace, and communities. The easiest place to start is by giving away copies of Acts of Kindness, 101 Ways To Make The World A Better Place. If you're interested in a purchase of five or more copies, email [books@rhonda.org](mailto:books@rhonda.org). I've negotiated a deal to provide them at about half the price listed on Amazon, and all the proceeds will go to the Successful Survivors Foundation to provide the program to TAY and rescued trafficking victims.

The next book, **KINDNESS QUOTIENT**, will help us show Kindness to people who cannot or will not reciprocate.

[rhonda.org](http://rhonda.org)



[kerivellis.com](http://kerivellis.com)

## Keri Vellis



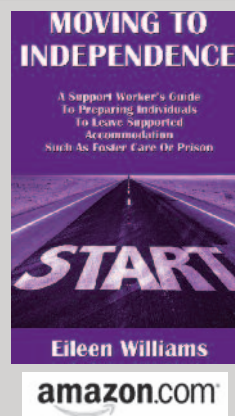
Keri Vellis and her husband are passionate and involved parents of six children: three biological and three adopted through the foster care system. Keri always enjoyed reading with her children but was surprised to find that the local bookstores and libraries did not offer age appropriate, yet engaging books relating to foster care and the experiences that those children encounter. She wanted the kids she fostered over the years to feel comfortable with new families and pets, schools and activities. It occurred to her that there was a void for all of the children who moved through the system, not just hers.



Through a swift series of coincidences, Keri was connected with illustrator Jin Lehr, a foster child herself! Having aged out of the system, Jin could actually feel the emotions of what Keri had written because she had gone through it as a child.

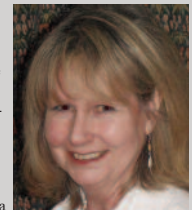
Keri's goal is for this book to help children transitioning to another home feel good about themselves and understand that there can be loving people around them and happiness in their lives. Keri and her thriving, busy family live in Sonoma County in Northern California.

Jin Lehr was born in Nebraska but quickly trekked all over the country, attending eleven different schools in just over 10 years. In a life of instability, the only control and constant was her art. Jin was placed in foster care after moving to Sonoma County, CA at age 13. The process of being a "foster kid" peeled away years of abuse and neglect. She found peace and positivity in drawing in sketchbooks, in her world of darkness and sadness. Her ultimate goal is to write and illustrate her own children's book one day. Jin, her husband, and their growing family call Sonoma County home.



## Eileen Williams

Eileen Williams worked as a full time Support Worker at a homeless project for young people and also part time with ex-offenders living with-in a probation hostel. Eileen began to feel she could be more help to individuals by providing full time support within a home environment, she consequently gave up her job and became a full time foster carer. Encouraged to focus on just one young person who had many complex issues in his life to deal with.



Eileen lives happily with her husband in the Suffolk countryside in the United Kingdom. She treasures precious time spent with her children and grandchildren.

Moving To Independence is an educational and insightful book, written from the heart around three Core Concepts developed by the author. The easy to follow narrative will clearly speak to you if you are involved in any way in supporting a young person on their way to independence. It can be dipped in and out of whenever opportunities arise. The book shares ideas and practical methods which help individuals to develop self-knowledge and self-respect, these then become the foundations on which they can build themselves a truly unique and stable home. Individuals are taken on a journey of self-discovery and support workers are able to fully engage with this.

After being guided through the book, young people will learn that they can be proud to own their own histories. They are encouraged to trust their own memories and feelings and have greater awareness of the validity of these. They are then able to build a future with confidence, optimism and a sense of belonging that will support them in their move on to the future.

## Rosemary Zibart



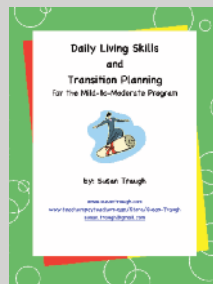
Rosemary Zibart is an award-winning author of books for young people, adoptive mom and former foster parent who earned an Angel in Adoption citation from the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute for her journalism on behalf of at-risk and vulnerable children in feature articles for PARADE, Time Magazine and other national publications.



What does it feel like to enter foster care? Told from a child's point of view, *Kit Coyote: A Brave Pup* answers many difficult questions: Where are my parents? Do they love me? Why can't I live with them? What's going to happen to me? This bright, appealing story encourages children to adjust to new situations and people, speak to trusted adults, express their feelings in creative ways and believe in their own capacity to survive and even thrive in a challenging situation.

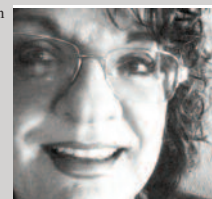
*"Kit Coyote: A Brave Pup" is a beautifully illustrated story that will be treasured by child therapists, social workers, foster parents, recovering parents and others who help children heal and grow from family disruptions."*

~ J. Tharinger, PhD, Founding Member, Therapeutic Assessment Institute and Author, *"Therapeutic Stories for Children Generated from Psychological Assessments"*



## Susan Traugh

Award-winning author Susan Traugh is a former teacher and holds a Masters in Education with an emphasis on curricula. Her Transition 2 Life and Daily Living Skills series have received acclaim from educators around the world. Susan is the mother of three incredible children, all with special needs. Working with both public and private schools to secure the best education for her kids, Susan realized the need for a comprehensive, age-appropriate transition program for at-risk and mild-to-moderately affected special needs teens. The resulting program has received acclaim worldwide.



Aging out of foster care can be a terrifying experience for teens—especially if they don't have the skills necessary to tackle adult living. Transition 2 Life and Daily Living Skills meet federal mandates for transition education and provide the foundation teens need to address a wide variety of "real life" skills. Subject areas include Adult Living, Cooking, Social Skills, Job Skills and Character Building. Individual workbooks range from Cleaning House, Paying Bills and Grocery Shopping to Everyday Manners, Safe Dating and Making Conversation. Other titles include Interviewing Skills, Getting a Paycheck, and Time Management, to Building Character, Decision Making and Overcoming Failure. All books are written on a 3rd/4th grade reading level for easy independent use while honoring a young adult's humor and sensibilities. All pages are liberally sprinkled with age-appropriate cartoons and illustrations and bullet-point information is used whenever possible. This highly affordable series includes assessments, grading sheets, answer keys, ITP Goals, and mandated Parent/Guardian information sheets designed to meet national standards.

[ZProductions505.com](http://ZProductions505.com)



[teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Susan-Traugh](http://teacherspayteachers.com/Store/Susan-Traugh)

[garbagebagsuitcase.com](http://garbagebagsuitcase.com)

[catmarshall.net](http://catmarshall.net)

## Mario McLean



Mario McLean, 24, native of Detroit, MI, survived the foster care system and is a product of Cass Technical High School & Michigan State University. His success both in and out of the classroom at MSU allowed him to be selected to be the Student Commencement Speaker at his graduation in 2015! Throughout his time at MSU, Mario also had the opportunity to Study Abroad to Puebla, Mexico, where he provided social support to children (ages newborn -12 years old) who came from a neglected family background history, much like him.

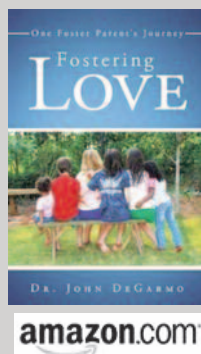


[amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

In *Every Day is an Interview*, I invite the reader into my life, describing some of my most daunting experiences and how I was able to recover from them.

My main motive in writing this book is to share with others my trials and tribulations – securing them that despite barriers and obstacles, you can still manage to be successful. I've lived and breathed it! I'm a living testimony! I believe God has placed me on this earth to share my story, so it is with great pleasure that I do just that.

I anticipate this book helping others to reach their highest potential through the learning of my personal background and upbringing. My guess is that there's somebody out there who went through or is still going through some of the same things that I've been through. There's somebody out there who is holding onto a lot of pain, agony and hurt and just need to release all of their bottled up emotions. I ask that this book will do just that.



Dr. John DeGarmo has been a foster parent for 10 years, now, and he and his wife have had over 40 children come through their home.

Dr. DeGarmo wrote his dissertation on fostering, entitled *Responding to the Needs of Foster Children in Rural Schools*.



[amazon.com](http://amazon.com)

Children suffering from abuse. Neglect. Malnutrition. Even drug-related problems passed on from a mother's addiction. Children rejected by those who were to love them most, their parents. When placed into a foster home, many of these children carry with them the physical and emotional scars that prevent them from accepting the love of another. This journey as a foster parent is the most difficult thing John DeGarmo has done.

Through the sleepless nights with drug-addicted babies, the battles with angry teens, and the tears from such tremendous sadness, John DeGarmo learns that to follow God's call in his life means to take up His cross in his own home.

*Fostering Love: One Foster Parent's Journey* is the true-life account of his experience as a foster parent, along with his wife and their own three children, as he followed God's call to take foster children into his home. This is a story of heartbreak, sadness, and ultimately love as he came to find God in the tears and smiles of many foster children.

For connection  
just add

*love*



**LOVE**  
— *is* —  
**ACTION**

[www.loveisactioncommunityinitiative.org](http://www.loveisactioncommunityinitiative.org)



# Waiting Faces



*Foster Focus* has decided to take on the task of helping the nation's aging Foster Care population find homes. *Anonymous Faces* will feature select Foster Children each month, who have been in Care for extended periods of time. These children are available for expedited adoption. It is the hope of *Foster Focus* that these very special children find proper homes to finish Care, and guidance as they make their own way through the world. Please take a few moments and get to know these children and if you feel you can help simply contact the representative from [www.afamilyforeverychild.com](http://www.afamilyforeverychild.com)



## California Child

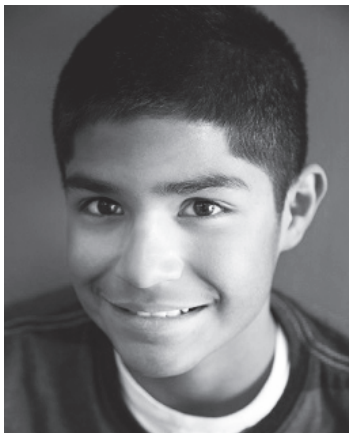
*Lisa and Latrina* are lovely siblings who desire the security and stability of an adoptive family.

*Lisa* is a personable and sweet girl who gets along with everyone. She is quiet and polite and appears older due to her vocabulary and understanding of adult matters. She is able to say what she likes and doesn't like and has positive relationships with adults and she relates well to her peers. She enjoys listening to music, writing and reading most.

Younger sister *Latrina* enjoys being outdoors and especially loves a trip to the mountains. She also likes arts and crafts and video games. She will be assessed through the school system to see if she can benefit from special services but always works hard at school. *Latrina* has some behavioral challenges that she is working on and she truly wants to belong to a family. She is learning appropriate coping skills and is making good progress. There are other siblings including three brothers that the girls would love to maintain their connections to for the rest of their lives and they would like a family that can support these important relationships.

## California Child

*Lizzie* is smart, creative and a huge lover of all animals, She is a rare gem that shines brighter with love and attention. *Lizzie* is an excellent student, achieving straight A's on her report card. *Lizzie* enjoys school and has begun to really excel in this area. *Lizzie* sees school as a means to get into college and has decided that her future will involve what she loves the most, animals. Her dream is to become a zoo keeper, helping exotic and endangered animals live healthy and safe lives. *Lizzie* hopes to find a family that will nurture her dreams, support who she is as a person and allow her room to stretch and grow into the amazing young woman she is destined to become.



## California Child

*Anthony* is thoughtful and very bright. It is obvious how focused he is when he speaks with you and looks you directly in the eye. He also enjoys lots of different sports like soccer and basketball. He is agile and full of fun and he throws himself into the games! *Anthony* loves sports such as soccer, swimming, baseball and basketball. He enjoys camping, being outdoors, playing at the park and even enjoys school. He also loves music and would love to learn how to play a musical instrument. *Anthony* is well liked and social. He states his ideal family would be a mom and a dad. He wouldn't mind sharing the love with a sibling or two.

[www.afamilyforeverychild.org](http://www.afamilyforeverychild.org)



#### **Texas Child**

*Julie* is usually a shy child, but it doesn't take long for her to warm up to you. Though she requires assistance in school as well as her daily living skills, she is able to help with daily chores when given simplified instructions. She is definitely a people pleaser and is always smiling. *Julie* likes to swim, listen to music, paint, and color. *Julie* loves dancing whenever she hears any type of music. Learning new things and being independent are important to *Julie* and she continues to strive to conquer new challenges. *Julie* likes being around people and gets along well with her peers and adults

*Julie* is best matched with a family who is able to understand her unique abilities and limitations in the ability to function in areas of daily life, such as communication, self-care, and getting along in social situations and school activities. *Julie's* adoptive family will understand the need for simplified instructions and be able to repeat proper behavioral experiences until it is learned.

*Child is under Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.*

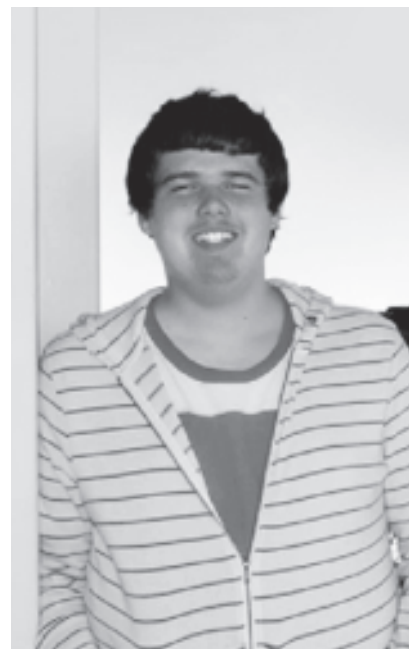
#### **Texas Child**

"I'm thinking about learning to be a mechanic or maybe going into the military."

*Jared* is a happy-go-lucky youth who describes himself as "calm and easy going;" a guy who doesn't get upset about much. He can be quiet and shy at first, but he's just taking it all in before he decides to warm up to you. *Jared* is easy to get along with and enjoys meaningful conversations on a variety of topics. He is thinking about joining the military in the future or perhaps attending college; maybe both. *Jared* is very talented and mechanically minded. He is gifted in figuring out how things work and fit together, and enjoys working with his hands. Like many teens, *Jared* enjoys spending time with his friends and listening to music. He is well aware of how his friends are either a positive or negative influence; he tries to lean toward the positive side. *Jared* likes cars and sports, and has a heart filled with hopes and dreams of becoming a man who will make a difference in this world.

*Jared's* forever family will have realistic expectations of a teenage boy growing up in today's world. He will need a very understanding and patient family who will help and encourage him to set goals and reach them with persistence and focus. *Jared* is looking for a family who will be committed to him and cheer him on as he pursues his hopes and dreams. *Jared* wants a family who wants him, who will be there for him, and who will help "point the way."

*Child is under Texas Department of Family and Protective Services.*



#### **Ohio Child**

*Brittani* is a pre-teen with a ton of spunk and personality! She is very outgoing and talkative. She loves to laugh and be silly. She cares about other people and wants to help when she can. She enjoys dressing up and doing crafts. *Brittani* has an adventurous spirit and isn't afraid to try new things.

*Brittani* at times can struggle with boundaries and being bossy. She is working on these issues in therapy. She is currently in a foster home where she is doing very well. The right family for *Brittani*, should be firm and consistent with her. She would do well in a single parent or two parent home. *Brittani* would do well having older siblings who could be role models for her. It would benefit *Brittani* to have a permanent family who is comfortable with her having contact with her birth family. She is very bonded with her grandmother.

# Every 8 Seconds; A Symbol of Significance

By **Jenny Christiansen**  
*Foster Focus Contributor*

Eight seconds is not just a space in time. It is a symbol of significance. According to the United States Census Bureau, a child is born every 8 seconds in this country! Each one possesses something that no one before them has: A unique identity.

Their authentic, tangible identity is in them. As kids age, they will begin to "identify" with groups and activities such as sports, music, art or debate-but the most empowering part of them is IN THEM-their innate, one of a kind identity. It is not what they identify "with," that sustains them, but rather their unique gifts, strengths, and dreams that propel them forward to the place where they will make the most impact.

As a child, I grew up going to a small lake in the summers. We would swim, waterski and go fishing. I found shiny lures fascinating and was mesmerized watching the fish chase after them. Fish find them attractive because they are bright, new and exciting. These lures also meant potential disaster for a fish, if they took the bait.

Societal lures are baiting our children. Caring and invested adults play an inexplicably important role in the lives of kids not taking the bait. We need to adopt a laser-like focus that will help shape and guide kids as they maneuver through life. We need to notice--really notice them daily. Spending too much time alone, bored, having few boundaries or a lack of direction can make them susceptible to dangerous lures like drugs and alcohol, eating disorders, gangs, crime, and even traffickers. These lures attempt to steal their unique identity so that they are indistinguishable from the rest of the crowd.

Popular culture and media are accessible and powerful lures as well. While it is not all bad, social media, video games, movies and advertisements appeal to the masses. The fallout occurs when our kids believe the lie about who and what they should BE instead of what they were destined for--to walk in their identity and make an impact.

Behavioral and physical changes along with negative attitudes have become culturally expected with children, tweens, and teens as they mature. But we must ask ourselves, "Are we, and do we ask the tough questions when we meet resistance?" Are we willing to guard against the stealing of their identities, their potential, and their very futures getting sabotaged? We need to fight for them and with them to keep destructive lures at bay.

Every 8 seconds world changers are born. Our kids are worthy. Living out their authentic identity is where they will feel the most self-worth, happiness, and contentment.



**Jenny Christiansen** is a Life Coach, Speaker, Youth Advocate & Author. She has spent 25 years of her adult life as an educator and school administrator. Having spent her life with children, and teens, she knows what works and what destroys. Jenny is a wife, a mom, and a grandmother who is all about helping others find their unique identity and impact.

[www.jennychristiansen.org](http://www.jennychristiansen.org)



# Dave Thomas Foundation *for Adoption*<sup>®</sup>

Finding Forever Families for Children in Foster Care



[davethomasfoundation.org](http://davethomasfoundation.org)



# Improving Lives.

Cenpatico's Foster Care Program works collaboratively with the child welfare system and various stakeholders to help improve the safety, permanency and well-being of children by serving as a behavioral health partner, improving quality and continuity of care.