

Picture This: Foster Care



The Entertainment Industries Council, Inc.
www.eiconline.org

Picture This: Foster Care is a guide to the key issues within the realm of foster care as identified by experts, advocates, policy-makers and others working to improve public awareness about foster care.

Picture This: Foster Care

Picture This: A resource for entertainment creators and news media. . .



“ In reality, foster children and foster youth across America are waging courageous struggles to overcome tragic circumstances in their lives. Media and the community need to take notice.” ”

—Celeste Bodner, Executive Director, Foster Club

entertainment & media
communication institute 
A Division of the Entertainment Industries Council, Inc.

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“The test of the morality of a society is what it does for its children.”

—Dietrich



Brian Dyak

Foreword

Special Message to the Creative Community

To a child in the foster care system that has struggled with abuse, neglect, or emotional problems, the world may seem like an uphill battle. Children deserve every opportunity to live in a happy, caring, supportive environment that can help bring them the future they ought to have. Currently in America, there are over 500,000 children in foster care. With guidance and support from adults and others, youth in foster care are capable of realizing their fullest potential. Children's issues are on the agenda and at the forefront of the minds of Americans, parents, advocates, experts and politicians. Yet across the U.S., there is progress to be made toward permanency and well-being of children, achieving positive outcomes for children within the foster care system and improving child welfare system performance.

Working with the media is key to making significant strides toward greater awareness of foster care-related issues. Entertainment education strategies have the ability to influence and interact with individuals, societies and institutions to affect social change. How? By raising the public's awareness to important health and social issues and providing accurate information, realistic depictions and positive messages.

In a step toward depicting foster care issues in an accurate and entertaining manner, EIC, in collaboration with the Casey Family Programs and the National Association of Broadcasters hosted *Picture This: Foster Care*, a forum for health experts and advocates, to recommend priorities for writers, directors, producers and other creative talent.

Through the convening power of the entertainment industry, all of the organizations and individuals listed within this publication came together for a common purpose: to determine the most pressing concerns related to foster care. The group identified priorities for depictions of important concerns including aging out, normalizing foster care, kinship care, systemic issues, and diversity and cultural competency within the foster care system.

A panel of entertainment writers explained the challenges and opportunities for depicting these issues onscreen and took part in a dialogue with experts and individuals with firsthand experience of foster care. This publication is the result of that meeting. It is intended to encourage the creative process, not inhibit it. Within these pages you will find factual information and depiction suggestions about foster care to get you thinking about ways you can inspire, move and possibly even help your audience.

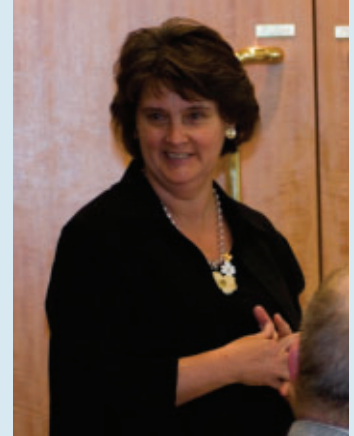
Thank you for your continued commitment to making a difference through your art.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Dyak". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial "B".

Brian Dyak
President and CEO
Entertainment Industries Council, Inc.

“ Family is the central building block of our society, where we all learn and love and grow up and grow old together. Children who for whatever reason are unable to be cared for by their biological parents have the very strongest claim on our communities' support. There are hundreds of thousands of children in foster care every day in the United States, and hundreds of thousands of foster and adoptive parents striving to provide them love and support. There are also biological parents struggling mightily with their own challenges so as to be able to love and support their children better themselves. The entertainment industry has a wonderful opportunity to portray their lives – their challenges and triumphs – realistically and in a way that helps better understanding and support for these young people and their caregivers. And this absolutely can be done consistent with the imperative to create captivating viewing. My days as a juvenile court judge presiding over foster care matters were never dull – not always because of bad news, but because of miracles as well.



—Anne Holton, First Lady of Virginia



Table Discussions

Foster Care and the Media

Communicating about Foster Care

Communicating about health and social issues is an everyday part of life that involves mass media coverage, entertainment and sports programming, public policy action and more. Communication is increasingly recognized as a necessary element of all efforts to improve wellbeing and undoubtedly contributes to all aspects of education and awareness about foster care.

Effective communication about foster care can help raise awareness of successful outcomes, provide motivation to become involved and offer solutions to problems faced. Communicating about foster care may also increase the demand for appropriate services and make information available to assist in influencing the public agenda, advocate for policies and programs and promote positive changes.

Important guidelines for communicating about children outlined by Luntz, Maslansky (2008)ⁱ include the following:

1. Make it personal
2. Every child matters - no exceptions
3. Positive impact grabs attention...but negative consequences drive action
4. Results, not effort, matter most

The ever-expanding number of communication channels and social issues on the public agenda increases competition for people's time and attention. Entertainment and news media provide ideal platforms for sharing important health and social information to audiences at large.

The Role of Entertainment and News Media

One of the main challenges in generating awareness about important issues is using the optimal contexts, channels and content that will motivate people to pay attention to and use that information.

Popular entertainment and news media have undeniable power in grabbing the attention of audiences, as well as providing information, shaping perceptions, and affecting emotions. Entertainment-education engages viewers' emotions and often leads people to think about themselves and their own attitudes and behaviors. For

example, this provides a powerful way to present role models within the foster care system.

Entertainment and news media often use story-telling to communicate about experiences and provide an environment where viewers can identify with the situations, conflicts and feelings of the characters portrayed. Accurate depictions through popular entertainment and news media can make a difference in how audiences understand foster care issues.



Dispelling Myths about Foster Careⁱⁱ

MYTH: There are not enough loving families available who want to adopt a foster child.

FACT: Many prospective adoptive parents may initially want to adopt an infant, often because they are unaware that there are older children who also need families. When they learn about an older child available for adoption, they often "fall in love" and realize the enormous impact they can have on that child's life. Older children can share their feelings about joining a new family, helping to make the adoption and transition process successful. Four in 10 American adults have considered adoption, according to a National Adoption Attitudes Survey funded by the Dave Thomas Foundation for Adoption. That translates into 81.5 million Americans. If only one out of 500 Americans adopted out of the foster care system, these children would have homes.

MYTH: There's too much red tape and bureaucracy involved in adopting a child from foster care.

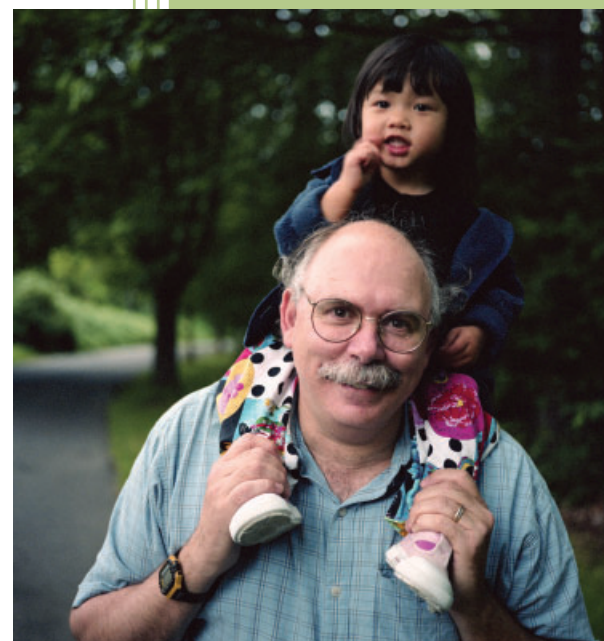
FACT: Congress has streamlined the foster care adoption process through enactment of the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997. This law ensures that children in foster care, who cannot be reunited with their birth parents, are freed for adoption and placed with permanent families as quickly as possible.

MYTH: Adopting a child from foster care is expensive.

FACT: Many prospective parents do not know that adopting children from foster care is virtually free, while private or international adoptions can cost anywhere from \$4,000 to \$30,000 or more. A growing number of companies and government agencies offer adoption assistance as part of their employee benefit packages, including time off for maternity/paternity leave, financial incentives and other benefits. In addition, Congress has made federal tax credits available for foster care adoptions to help offset required fees, court costs, legal expenses and travel expenses. In June 2001, President George W. Bush signed a revised adoption tax credit, which took effect in January 2003, to increase the amount of the credit to \$10,000 for all adoptive families. Benefits such as these are enabling more families to adopt foster children into their homes. More information is available in the IRS Publication 968: Tax Benefits for Adoption, which can be obtained by calling 1-800-829-3676, or visiting www.irs.ustreas.gov.

MYTH: Children in foster care have too much "baggage."

FACT: This is perhaps the biggest myth of all. Foster children, just like any others, have enormous potential to thrive given love, patience, and a stable environment. Just ask U.S. Senator Ben "Nighthorse" Campbell, Minnesota Viking Dante Culpepper, Washington, D.C. Mayor Anthony Williams, or Miss USA 2000 Lynette Cole. They were all once foster children who were adopted by caring adults.



MYTH: You could never love an adoptable child as much as a biological child. Your child will never consider you their real parent.

FACT: The period from birth through three years of age is the most favorable time for children to form a bond with their families. However, adoptive parents have no need for undue concern. Observation and research over the past fifty years tells us that love and attachment are not the result of biology, rather the availability of a support system. The bonding process takes time, and with any relationship, it is developed through trust and commitment. Identify and accept your feelings early on, and develop the techniques to facilitate the bonding experience. Responding to the child's needs in a compassionate, loving and sensitive way encourages trust and recognition that the child is worthy of unconditional love. Responding to the child's needs in a loving way leads to an increased sense of trust, security and a reduction in anxiety.

MYTH: It's too difficult to find information on how to adopt.

FACT: There are resources available to help potential parents take the first step towards adopting out of foster care. For more information, log on to www.nationaladoptionday.com, www.davethomasfoundation.org, www.adoptUSkids.org, or simply call 1-800-TO-ADOPT.



Portraying a Clear Picture of Foster Care through Depiction Priorities

A diverse representation of experts, advocates and other stakeholders who interface with various facets of foster care on a daily basis was convened to come to a consensus on depiction priorities and recommendations for entertainment and news media to address foster care.

We asked our Picture This participants this question:

"If foster care-related issues could be addressed in entertainment and news media in any manner, what are the most important aspects of foster care to communicate to national audiences?"

The following reflect the top priorities as identified by our expert attendees:

Priority 1: Portray issues related to Aging Out of the Foster Care System.

- Aging out refers to when a youth emancipates or leaves foster care because they turn a certain age, such as 18 or 21. There are dramatic, and oftentimes negative, outcomes that can happen to young people who exit the foster care system without a permanent connection to caring, loving and supportive adult(s). Consider portraying realistic outcomes including mental health-related issues, homelessness, post-traumatic stress disorder, addiction, criminal acts, reduced educational achievement, domestic violence and unintended pregnancies.
- Consider portraying the realities of foster care, including the struggles involved in starting over. This may include depictions of not only losing old families, but also old coaches, friends, pastors, and other important people.
- Conversely, consider depicting positive outcomes of young people who are connected with a loving, supportive adult or social network. This can include connections established with siblings, birth parents, foster families, the community, educational system and others. Portraying these connections is essential to demonstrate the importance of relationships and establishing permanence in a foster child's life. For example, just as a photo album serves as a glimpse into a person's life and background, personal relationships emphasize past connections and a sense of self.
- Everyone, not just youth in foster care, has a need to belong; a drive for connectivity. Consider portraying the importance of this need, whether it's through family or networks of friends or professional associations. Even further, portray how to successfully establish connections in characters who may be struggling in new or different circumstances.



Priority 2: Normalize Foster Care through Accurate Depictions.

- There are great opportunities to portray success stories through having foster care graduates as successful main characters or heroes in storylines where foster care is just one element of that character's background story. This theme can be woven into the background of stories as normal kids and normal families. These depictions would allow the opportunity for audiences to connect with being a part of that hero experience, whether you're the basketball coach or the teacher at school, the foster parent, the adoptive parent or the foster child.
- Oftentimes children in the foster care system are portrayed as having behavioral issues. Consider dispelling myths about foster care by portraying individuals in foster care as normal children who may act out simply because they are teenagers, etc. Also, at times foster parents are portrayed as mean or malicious people. Consider portraying the positive care and support provided by foster care parents.
- There is a preconceived notion that if birth parents were drug addicts or had behavioral issues that their children will also act out in a "the apple doesn't fall far from the tree" scenario. Consider portraying success stories where that apple can develop into sweet apple pie or apple cider so-to-speak.
- In portrayals of foster care issues, consider including the role of supportive professionals such as social workers that can provide care and assistance to those in the foster care system.
- Normalizing foster care issues through depictions may also create positive role models for potential foster parents and children to relate to.
- Consider portraying the realities of the resiliency among kids in foster care. Additionally, consider portraying normal, emotional occurrences in foster families. For example, take into account scenarios where foster children ask questions about their birth parents and are looking for answers to explain why they were "given up" and are in the foster care system.

Priority 3: Depict the Roles of Kinship Care or "Grandfamilies."

- Kinship care is also known as "grandfamily care" whereby a child is placed in the care of birth family members, godparents, stepparents, or other adults who have a kinship bond with the child. This may be an informal agreement, a formal foster care placement or a pre-adoptive placement. Consider portraying the likelihood of this arrangement within the foster care system and the successes of children who are raised by grandfamilies.
- Consider portraying the risks involved when grandfamilies assume care of children, including low or limited incomes, and the caregiver's health and stress.
- Consider showing the importance of children being raised in grandfamilies in maintaining connectivity and support for the children.
- When developing storylines and characters, bear in mind that there is a strong effort to keep siblings in foster care together.



Priority 4: Portray Diversity and Cultural Competency Issues in Foster Care.

- Children of various racial and ethnic population groups are disproportionately represented in foster care, a situation which raises questions about the equity of the foster care system and additionally may threaten the developmental progress of children of color. Consider portraying the realities of diversity within the foster care system and the effects of that disproportionate representation on children.
- Diversity and cultural competence plays a big part in connectivity of foster children and foster families. Oftentimes biases and misperceptions exist that may hinder child development and a sense of belonging. Consider depicting families that are open to diversity and supportive of foster children's culture(s).

Priority 5: Portray the Problems with the Foster Care System.

- Systemic issues may delay permanency or compromise foster child and family well-being. This may include the absence of adequate and effective services for parents, particularly those with severe and recurring mental health or drug abuse problems; long waiting lists for needed services; limited low income housing; inexperienced caseworkers; high caseworker caseloads and turnover rates; crowded court dockets; and inadequate parental legal representation. Consider portrayals of these issues alongside of ways to overcome barriers to better serve foster children and families.
- There is a constant need for cohesion, leadership and accountability within the national foster care system to avoid negative outcomes for all parties involved. One important element is a lack of preparation for foster children as they age out of the system at eighteen years old. Consider portraying outcomes of youth who are well prepared to leave the system and become responsible adults. Additionally consider portraying the realities of needing a safety net in times of financial and emotional need after age eighteen.
- Consider portraying the need to improve educational opportunities for children in the foster care system.

“

The media has an enormous opportunity to be catalysts for healing and hope for the half million children in America's foster care system.”

—Susan Hoag Badeau, Director of the Cross Systems Integration, Casey Family Programs



Frequently Asked Questions with Susan Hoag Badeau

1. Who is a Foster Parent?

Foster parents come from all walks of life.

They are single, married, divorced, male or female, straight or gay.

They are young (at least 21), or already grandparents.

They live in apartments, houses or farms.

They stay at home with children, or have a career.

They are able-bodied, or live with disabilities.

They come from all racial and ethnic backgrounds and belong to many different communities of faith.

Sometimes, they are already related to the children they care for (sometimes called "kin" or "relative caregivers").

What they have in common is a genuine love for children and a desire to make a difference in the lives of children and families.

2. What are the basic requirements to be a foster parent?

Foster parents, many of whom are relatives of the children and youth they care for, provide an important resource to the child or youth, the family and the whole community. This is the reason that foster parents are often referred to as resource parents. Foster parents are an essential part of the child welfare system. The first step in becoming a foster parent is to be licensed by your state or county agency. Each state has slightly different requirements, but this typically involves interviews and discussions in your home, assurance that your home meets safety standards, completion of basic paperwork (including background checks), and participation in educational classes. Foster parents come from many walks of life, are spread across age groups and do not have to be wealthy. Foster parents may already have biological children or may be childless. Single or married adults are all encouraged to consider becoming foster parents.

3. How long do children stay in foster care?

While children may stay in foster care anywhere from a few days to many years, foster care is intended to be temporary, providing support to children until they are able to become part of a lifelong family (often called a "permanent" family) by returning home to their birth parents, living permanently with relatives, often in legal guardianship, or by being adopted.

4. Can foster parents adopt a foster child?

Yes, at times. If it is determined that a young person cannot return home, foster parents can play an instrumental role in whatever permanent plan is best for that

child. Every child needs a lifelong, permanent family. The first priority in nearly every case is to work with the child's birth family to resolve the issues that brought the child into care quickly, so the child can return home. When this is not possible, adoption is often the next most appropriate permanency option. When adoption is being considered for a child in foster care, the foster parents are among the first resources considered. This is because they have established a relationship and some attachments to the child. Of the children in foster care who are adopted, the largest portion of those children are adopted by their foster parents.

5. Are foster parents involved with the child's natural (or birth) parents?

The primary goal of foster care is to ensure that each child has the opportunity to grow up in a stable, permanent family. In most cases, this will be the child's birth family, and it is the role of the foster parents to support the child's relationship with the birth family in ways that will lead to the child's return home -referred to as reunification. The foster parent can assist in the reunification process in many ways, including:

- Being a role model and mentor for the birth parents
- Supporting the child's or youth's relationship with her parents
- Sharing helpful information with the birth parents about health care, educational progress and other issues - examples might include sharing copies of school report cards, notes from doctor visits or recent photos
- Remaining positive and supportive in following family visitation plans and telephone contact
- Providing emotional support for young people as they prepare to return home
- Being available to both the young person and his or her parents after she returns home as a resource and source of support
- Allowing parents and other birth family members to take part in important holidays, birthdays or other special occasions (such as school plays) with your family or separately.

6. Do foster children's birth parents visit him or her?

State regulations require that foster children be permitted to visit their parents and/or family frequently. This is important to the child's sense of stability and well-being while in foster care, and is a critical element to successful reunification. Visits may include the child's birth parents, other family members and siblings. A visiting plan is usually decided jointly by the agency social worker, the child or youth's family, and other members of the child's team, including the foster parent. Sometimes a Family Court judge will order a particular visitation schedule. Foster parents play an important role during visits. Often, when everyone agrees that it will not jeopardize safety, foster parents will be asked to host visits in their home.



Foster parents support and nurture the child and family as they work toward restoring their relationship. There may be times when this role is difficult for the foster parent, particularly if the child becomes upset or acts out before or after visits. These are natural reactions for many children, and it may be important for foster parents to seek guidance and support to help a child through these times. However, these challenges are not valid reasons to discourage or discontinue visits. Remember, the foster parent role is to help the young person maintain the important connections in his or her life.

7. What questions do foster children/adopted children often have about their birth families? Do you have any suggestions on how to handle the conversation?

Any and all communication with children in foster care should be open, honest and respectful. Most children will have their own thoughts, feelings and memories about their birth family and the foster parent can help the child process and reflect on these feelings. Responding in a manner that invites further conversation, rather than demonstrating discomfort, is the most important gift the foster parent can give the child. You will not know all the answers, but allowing the questions and being willing to seek further information through the child's social worker and agency is enormously helpful to the child in foster care.

8. How does the foster care system attempt to keep birth siblings together?

Nearly three quarters of all children and youth in foster care have one or more siblings, and it is the policy and practice of the foster care system to place siblings together in the same home whenever possible. However, experience demonstrates that as many as 75% of all children and youth in foster care will experience separation from at least some of their siblings for some period of their time in foster care. Yet, these sibling relationships are among the most important connections a young person will ever have, and they often create the best opportunity for permanency. Foster parents can help honor sibling relationships in several ways, including:

- Letting the caseworker know that you are willing to be a foster parent for siblings
- Getting to know other foster parents of siblings to learn about the dynamics of parenting multiple children from the same family
- Planning individual time with each child or youth
- When siblings are separated, plan activities to bring them together as often as possible - play dates, lunches, attending the other siblings sporting events or musical concerts, etc.
- Set up mechanisms for children and youth to communicate with their siblings by phone, email or in other ways



- Advocate for siblings to remain together
- Seek to continue this contact, even if the other siblings go into separate permanent placements

9. What is the role of the foster family as children reach 18 - aging out of the system?

For most parents, preparing their children for independence and adulthood is a lifelong task, beginning in very early childhood. Each time a parent teaches a child to master a life skill, such as tying shoes, or toilet training, that child is a step closer to successful life as an independent adult one day. As children grow into adolescents, this preparation for adulthood takes on a new sense of importance, and parents begin to teach their teens about managing a checkbook, getting and keeping a job, planning a menu and shopping for groceries, etc. Even when young people move away from their parents' home for college, the military, marriage or their first independent apartment, in most cases, they still have access to their parents and other family members for advice, help and even financial support when needed.

Yet, for children and youth in foster care, the acquisition of life skills in this "normal" sequence does not always happen, and when they leave care at the age of 18, they often do not have access to the safety-net of a supportive and financially stable family to assist them in these ways. Therefore, it is of special importance that foster parents of adolescents pay particular attention to their need to learn and master the skills they will need to successfully manage their lives as independent adults.

Some of the skills a foster parent should encourage a youth to develop, and provide opportunities within the home to practice include:

- Budgeting and money management, including handling their own money, establishing credit and learning to save for future needs
- Menu and nutrition planning, grocery shopping and food preparation
- Seeking, obtaining and holding onto a job
- Managing their own health care, including making appointments, locating services, taking medications
- Preventing unintended pregnancies, and preparing for healthy sexual relationships
- Seeking and obtaining an apartment
- Care of clothing and personal items
- Managing their own transportation needs, including capacity to safely use public transportation, driver's education and exploration of obtaining a driver's license (discuss with the youth's caseworker for legal and insurance issues)
- Planning for post-secondary education, including meeting pre-entry requirements, testing, application deadlines, campus visits and interviews, and financial aid



- Managing adult relationships, including knowledge of safety, personal boundaries and other relationship skills and issues
- Crisis management - knowing how to seek resources and who to call in an emergency.

Foster parents should advocate for youth in their home to receive the full range of independent living services for which they are eligible.

Some youth may have additional special needs during this transitional time in their life. For example, you may be asked to provide a foster home to an adolescent who is already parenting a young child. Your role, in addition to that mentioned above may include assisting in child care, and modeling parenting skills. Or you may be the foster parent of an adolescent with significant developmental disabilities, in which case, the Office of Vocational Rehabilitation Services can provide support beyond those provided by the foster care agency.

In all of these instances, the most important element is to engage and involve the young person herself in the development of skills, in the utilization of available services and supports and most importantly of all, in developing and maintaining lifelong connections with caring supportive adults in their lives.

10. How do birth children react to foster children in foster care families?

How birth children react to foster children in the home will largely depend on the preparation they receive prior to the family embarking on this adventure. Here are a few tips on preparing children already in the family for the arrival of new foster children into the home

- Start reading books together about foster care.
- Find out what fears your child may have about the new children coming into the home. Try to take steps to alleviate these fears. For example, children may worry that you will place them into foster care, or that they will lose their special time with you, or that they will have to give up their room. These are real issues that you can address with each child individually.
- Respect each young person's need for some private space. If they cannot each have their own room, then make sure they each get some special private space such as a footlocker that locks or a shelf in a closet that is just theirs.
- Decide when it is appropriate to begin discussing foster care with your children. Remember, the process can take some time and children can get impatient. On the other hand, they need a fair amount of preparation time and should not be suddenly "surprised" with an unexpected new child in the home.



National Foster Care Resources

- Adoptive Family Services
<http://www.adoptivefamilyservices.org/>
 (304)767-8291
- Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.
<http://www.al-anon.alateen.org/>
 (757) 563-1600
- Alliance for Children and Families
<http://www.alliance1.org/>
 (414) 359-1040
- United Neighborhood Centers of America
<http://www.unca.org/>
 (414) 359-6576
- Barker Foundation
<http://www.barkerfoundation.org/>
 301-664-9664
- Buffalo Urban League
<http://www.buffalourbanleague.org/>
 (716) 854-7625
- Casey Family Programs
www.casey.org
 (212) 863-4860
- Child and Family Services Agency
<http://cfsa.dc.gov/cfsa/site/default.asp>
 (202) 442-6000
- Children's Defense Fund
<http://www.childrensdefense.org/>
 800-CDF-1200
- Fairfax County Foster Care and Adoption Program
<http://www.fairfaxcounty.gov/dfs/webdocs/fostercare/adoption.htm>
 703-324-7800
- Foster Care Alumni of America
<http://www.fostercarealumni.org/>
 (703)299-6767
- Foster Club Alumni
<http://64.78.32.155/grownups/news.cfm>
 503-717-1552
- Generations United
<http://www.gu.org/>
 202-289-3979
- Georgetown University
<http://www.georgetownuniversityhospital.org/>
 202-444-2000
- HHS Office on Women's Health
<http://www.womenshealth.gov/owh/>
 1-800-994-9662
- Maryland Foster Youth Resource Center (MFYRC)
<http://www.mfyrc.org/>
 410-889-7474
- Maryland State Foster Parent Association
<http://www.nfpainc.org/replac/>
 1-866-635-4371
- National Association of Social Workers
<http://www.socialworkers.org/>
 202-408-8600
- National Association of Counties
<http://www.naco.org/>
- National Foster Parent Association
<http://www.nfpainc.org/>
 800-557-5238
- National Urban League
<http://www.nul.org/>
 212-558-5385
- The Campaign for Youth Justice
<http://www.campaign4youthjustice.org/>
 202.558.3580
- Youth Crime Watch of America
<http://www.ycwa.org/>
 305-670-2409

Foster Care Language/Terminology

Abuse

The use or treatment of someone or something that is seen as harmful. Abuse of a person can be physical, sexual, emotional, verbal, or a combination of any or all of those. Abuse of a substance may involve alcohol or drugs.

ACSLA - (See Ansell Casey Life skills Assessment)

ADD - (See Attention Deficit Disorder)

Addiction

When a person has no control over whether he or she uses drugs or alcohol. For example, someone who's addicted to cocaine has grown so used to the drug that he or she has to have it. Addiction can be physical, psychological, or both.

Adoption

The creation of a new, permanent relationship between an adoptive parent and a child. Once this happens, there is no legal difference between a child who is adopted and a child who is born into a family. Adoption can happen at any time, from baby to teenager (or even beyond). Adoption can be by a relative, foster parent, or a completely new family. An adoptive family might be a single parent, a couple, or a family with kids.

Advocate

A person who speaks up on behalf of themselves or someone else in an effort to gain services or things.

Agency

The organization responsible for providing services while a child or youth is in foster care. Agencies may have names such as CPS, DHS, or CFS and may be run by the county, state or by a private organization.

Aging Out

When a youth emancipates or leaves foster care because they turn a certain age, such as 18 or 21 (depending on the laws of the state they live in). Aging out usually results in loss of support from the State for things such as foster care payments, housing, living costs and health services.

Ansell Casey Life Skills Assessment

An evaluation of young person's skills which will contribute to their success as they transition to adulthood. Available for free at caseylifeskills.org.

Appeal

Someone asks for a hearing to change the court's decision. Any court decision is subject to an appeal. Appeals can take several months to resolve.

Arraignment

The court gives an individual a chance to admit or deny the crime or to let the judge decide.

Attention Deficit Disorder

A medical condition that affects how well someone can sit still, focus, and pay attention. People with ADHD (persistent pattern of inattention or hyperactivity) have differences in the parts of their brains that control attention and activity. This means that they may have trouble focusing on certain tasks and subjects, or they may seem "wired," act impulsively, and get into trouble.

Attorney

A professional person authorized to practice law and give legal advice. Most young people in foster care are represented by an attorney in court, who helps to protect their best interests. The agency, biological parents, adoptive parents and others involved in the case may have their own attorney. Also called a lawyer.

Biological Parent

The person(s) who gave birth, or fathered the child.

Caregiver

A person who has the responsibility to care for a young person in foster care.

CASA - (See Court Appointed Special Advocate)

Case Plan

A plan that the foster care agency, along with the youth and family, makes and updates regularly. It includes the services provided to the youth and family, and makes clear the expectations and progress made toward reaching the goals for the child or youth.

Caseworker

Works with youth and their families to provide services and support, with the goal of permanent placement for the youth.

Chafee

An abbreviation for the Chafee Foster Care Independence Program, named after John H. Chafee, the U.S. Senator responsible for introducing legislation that offers assistance to help current and former youth in foster care achieve self-sufficiency. The legislation provides funds for Independent Living Programs and Education and Training Vouchers for higher education.

Child Protective Services

Works with children, youth and families (sometimes the children and youth are still in their homes) to assess, investigate and provide ongoing social services to families where abuse and neglect of youth has been reported.

Confidentiality

The legal requirement that information is kept secret. Usually attorneys, caseworkers, social workers, foster parents and other professionals involved with a young person's foster care case are not to disclose identifying or other significant information about the foster care case without legal authority and the written consent of the involved parties to do so.

Court Appointed Special Advocate

An adult volunteer, assigned by the court to study and protect the best interests of a youth in a civil, criminal abuse or neglect case. The CASA and the youth should talk on an ongoing basis. The CASA is your voice in the courtroom.

CPS - (See Child Protective Services)

Custody

The care, control, and maintenance of a child, which can be legally awarded by the court to an agency in abuse and neglect cases, or to parents in divorce, separation, and adoption proceedings. Child welfare departments retain legal custody and control over the major decisions for a child that is in foster care. Foster parents do not have legal custody of the children that are in their care.

Dependent Child

A child who has been placed in the legal custody of either the state or the county foster care system by the courts, usually due to the abandonment, abuse or neglect of the child by a parents or other caregiver.

Developmental Disability

A physical or mental impairment which can limit a young person's ability in the following areas: self care, language skills, learning, personal mobility, self-direction, potential for independent living and potential for economic self-sufficiency as an adult.

DHS or DHHS

Short for Department of Human Services or Department of Health and Human Services, common titles for the agency that provides services for children and youth in foster care. (See also Agency.)

Disposition

The decision about where the youth should live (such as in state custody), as well as what the parents, agency and the youth must do to change the current situation. Sometimes court hearings are continued and changed to another date for various reasons. For instance, someone may not show up, or everyone at court may feel it's a good idea to delay the hearing.

Education and Training Voucher

Provides Federal Chafee funds for young people from foster care to support their higher education. In most cases, funds can help pay for a Trade or Vocational school, housing, transportation, books, fees and other costs related to education. (See also Chafee.)

Emancipation

A youth who is legally declared an adult (by a court) prior to age 18. A youth in foster care who emancipates is no longer a ward of the court (or in foster care).

Emotional Abuse

Emotional abuse can be difficult to pin down because there may not be physical signs. Emotional abuse happens when yelling and anger go too far or when an individual is criticized, threatened, or dismissed until their self-esteem and feelings of self-worth are damaged. Emotional abuse can hurt and cause damage just as physical abuse does.

Family Preservation

A program in most states that is designed to keep families together by providing support and intervention services to children and families in their home. The family is observed, evaluated and treated while they are still together, with a goal of avoiding foster care placement.

Fetal Alcohol Syndrome (FAS)

Refers to certain birth defects and impairments that may be suffered by a child as the result of heavy alcohol consumption by its mother during pregnancy. Symptoms may include significant learning and behavioral disorders (including ADHD), poor social judgment, and impulsive behaviors.

Fictive Kin

Refers to individuals that are unrelated by either birth or marriage, who have an emotionally significant relationship with another individual that takes on the characteristics of a family relationship.

Foster Care

Placing a child in the temporary care of a family other than its own as the result of problems or challenges that are taking place within the birth family.

Foster Home

A home which is licensed by the State or an agency to take in children and youth who have been placed in foster care.

GAL - (See Guardian Ad Litem)

Group Home

A home or facility where a number of unrelated young people live with house parents or rotating staff (caregivers). More specialized therapeutic or treatment group homes have specially-trained staff to assist children with emotional and behavioral difficulties. The make-up and staffing of the group home can be adapted to meet the unique needs of its residents.

Guardian

A person who fulfills some of the custodial and parenting responsibilities of the legal parents of a child, although the court or biological parents of the child may continue to hold some jurisdiction and decision making authority over the child. Guardians are subject to ongoing supervision by the court and do not have the same reciprocal rights of inheritance as birth or adoptive parents have with their children. The relationship between the guardian and child ends when it is terminated by the court, or when the child reaches the age of majority.

Guardianship - (See Legal Guardianship)

Guardian Ad Litem

Minor children cannot make legal decisions for themselves, nor bind themselves legally to any contractual obligations. Therefore, in any legal proceeding where the legal interests of a child and the legal interests of its parents are considered to be adverse or in conflict with each other, a guardian ad litem will be appointed for a child by the court. This independent adult will act on behalf of the child in the legal proceeding, and make certain that the interests and legal rights of the child are given

adequate consideration and are adequately protected in the process. The legal protective status of a guardian ad litem will exist only within the confines of the particular court case in which the appointment was made.

House Parents

People who supervise and provide care to young people in a group home or residence.

ICPC - (See Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children)

Independent Living Program

ILP is a program designed to provide support and services to young people preparing to transition from foster care to life on their own. Services often include training for employment, education, housing, relationships, health and other daily living skills.

Indian Child Welfare Act

A Federal law that gives Native American Indian Nations and Tribes, including the Alaskan Aleuts, the right to control foster care and adoptions that involve their tribal members, the children of their tribal members and those individuals that could become tribal members.

Individualized Education Plan

A written plan for educational support services and their anticipated outcomes. An IEP is developed for students who are enrolled in special education programs or are behind in their education, as is often the case for young people in foster care.

Interstate Compact on the Placement of Children

ICPC are laws which control the lawful movement of children from one state to another for the purposes of foster care placement and adoption.

Judge

The person who has oversight of the court hearing which determines what is in the best interest of a young person in foster care. The judge issues court orders, reads reports, hears arguments and decides whether the youth should be placed in the custody of the state (into foster care).

Kinship Care

Placement of a foster child in the home of someone who is related to the child by family ties or by a significant prior relationship connection.

Learning Disability

Problems that affect the brain's ability to receive, process, analyze, or store information which can make it difficult for a student to learn as quickly as someone who isn't affected by learning disabilities. A learning disability doesn't have anything to do with a person's intelligence.

Legal Guardianship

Placement with a person who is charged with the legal responsibility for the care and management of the child. A legal guardian will be under the supervision of the court and will be required to appear in court to give periodic reports about the status of the child and its estate.

Legally Free

Since a child can have only one set of legal parents at a time, when the parental rights of a child's biological parents are legally terminated, the child becomes legally "free" to be adopted by someone else who then becomes the legal parent.

Life Skills

Abilities that are helpful to a young person to possess or gain to ensure a successful transition to adulthood. These include skills and knowledge pertaining to employment, housing and home life, money management, health and self care, relationships, education, and daily living.

Lifbook

Pages or a packet of information prepared with or for a child about his/her social background. It includes pictures and stories about people, events and places which are important to the child's history and life.

Maltreatment

Physical abuse, neglect, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse of a child or youth.

Mental Health

The successful performance of the mind, leading to productive activities, fulfilling relationships with other people, and the ability to adapt to change and to cope with adversity.

Mental Illness

A disorder of the mind that causes unusual behavior.

Mentor

Somebody, usually older and with more experience, who provides advice and support to a young person.

Molestation

Unwanted sexual attention forced on a child or young person.

Neglect

When parents or guardians don't take care of the basic needs of the children who depend on them. Neglect occurs when a child or teen doesn't have adequate food, housing, clothes, medical care, or supervision. Emotional neglect occurs when a parent doesn't provide enough emotional support or deliberately and consistently pays very little or no attention to a child. Neglect is not when a parent doesn't give a kid something he or she wants, like a new computer or a cell phone. Neglect is one form of abuse, but probably the hardest type of abuse to define.

Notice of Hearing

This document contains details about when and where a foster care court hearing will take place and provides notice to people who may wish to appear or have something to say at court. This notice must be delivered to certain individuals such as attorneys, biological parents, foster parents and caregivers. In some cases, a foster child or youth may receive notice automatically or by special request from the judge or young person.

Obsessive/Compulsive Disorder (OCD)

OCD is a type of anxiety disorder. People with OCD become preoccupied with whether something could be harmful, dangerous, wrong, or dirty - or with thoughts about bad stuff that might happen. With OCD, upsetting or scary thoughts or images, called obsessions, pop into a person's mind and are hard to shake.

Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD)

A regular pattern of negative, defiant, disobedient, and hostile behavior toward authority figures that goes on for at least six months. May include frequent loss of temper, tendency to argue with adults, refusal to obey adult rules or requests, deliberate behaviors to annoy others, spiteful and vindictive behavior, use of obscene language, and other misbehaviors.

Orphan

A child who has no living parents, or whose parents have disappeared, abandoned, or are no longer able or willing to adequately support a child.

Orphanage

An institution that houses children who are orphaned, abandoned, or whose parents are unable to care for them. Orphanages are rarely used in the United States, but are more frequently found in other countries.

Parental Rights

All of the legal rights, and corresponding legal obligations, that go along with being the parent of a child. These include: the right to legal and physical custody of the child, the right to physical access or visitation with the child, the right to inherit property from the child and to have the child inherit property from the parent, the right to consent to medical care and treatment for the child, the right to consent to the marriage of the child or its enlistment in military service, the ability to contract on behalf of the child, the obligation to provide financial support for the child, the responsibility to provide a legal defense of the child in legal proceedings, the obligation to care for, direct and supervise the child, the obligation to be legally liable for certain damages caused by the child, the obligation to see that the child attends school, and the obligation to protect the child and provide a safe living environment for the child.

Paternity

The identity of the biological father of a child.

Permanence

To have an enduring kin-like relationship that is safe and meant to last a lifetime.

Permanency Pact

An agreement between a young person and a supportive adult which defines the scope of a relationship which is intended to provide permanence and specific supports for the youth.

Permanency Planning

The caseworker coordinates services for the youth and family to fix the problems that led to the youth's placement in state custody. The goal is to assure a long-term placement for the youth. This may be going home, staying in long-term foster care until age 18 or 21, or being placed for adoption.

Physical Abuse

Physical abuse is often the most easily spotted form of abuse. It may be any kind of hitting, shaking, burning, pinching, biting, choking, throwing, beating, and other actions that cause physical injury, leave marks, or produce significant physical pain.

Placement

This term is used to describe the point in time when a young person goes to live in a foster home, group home, or other temporary living arrangement.

Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD)

A very strong stress reaction that can develop after a traumatic event. Abuse, witnessing or experiencing any type of personal or environmental disaster, or being threatened with an assault can lead to PTSD. Symptoms may include: strong emotions, jitters, and trouble sleeping, eating, or concentrating. A person with PTSD might experience frequent thoughts and images of what happened, nightmares, or fears. The right care and support can reduce or eliminate these symptoms and allow a person to move on.

Protective Hearing

After an agency finds that a child is experiencing or in danger of abuse or neglect, the agency will initiate a court action. To protect the child, the court can issue temporary orders placing the child in shelter care during the investigation, ordering services, or ordering certain individuals to have no contact with the child.

PTSD - (See Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder)

Putative Father

A person who is believed to be the father of a child, or who claims to be the father of a child, at a time when there may not be enough evidence or information available to determine if it is true.

Reactive Attachment Disorder (RAD)

A condition that generally appears in children before age five, and is thought to result from a lack of consistent care and nurturing in early years. The disorder is characterized by the inability of a child or infant to establish age-appropriate social contact and relationships with others.

Relinquishment

When a birth parent voluntarily gives up his or her parental rights, often so that someone else can adopt the child.

Residential Facility

A structured care facility with highly trained staff that provide services to young people to overcome behavioral, emotional, mental, or psychological problems that have had harmful impacts on family life, school achievement, and peer relationships.

Respite Care

Temporary care for a youth in foster care, intended to give either the youth or foster parent (or provider) a break.

Reunification

Services that can bring a family back together by working on the problems that caused the separation of the youth from the family.

Self Advocacy

An individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate or assert his or her own interests, desires, needs, and rights. It involves making informed decisions and taking responsibility for those decisions.

Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse is any type of sexual contact between an adult and anyone younger than 18, or between a significantly older child and a younger child. If a family member sexually abuses another family member, this is called incest.

Sexually Transmitted Diseases

Sexually transmitted diseases (also known as STDs and once called venereal diseases or VD) are infectious diseases that spread from person to person through intimate contact.

Shelter

Temporary housing for a young person who needs an immediate safe place to live.

Sibling

Brother or sister.

Social Worker

A licensed professional who gives children and families support. Social workers play a key role in the recruitment of qualified foster parents, placing children in supportive homes, and coordinating available resources for families.

Special Needs

Children that are more difficult to provide foster care services or placements for because they are older, or have some form of physical, mental, emotional, or developmental challenge, or who are multi-ethnic or biracial children. This definition also includes children that are part of a sibling group that are expected to do better if they were placed in a foster home together.

STD - (See Sexually Transmitted Diseases)

Surrogate Parent

A person (usually a foster parent or care provider) who is appointed by the Department of Education to make sure that a youth's special education needs are being met.

Termination of Parental Rights

If family reunification has been ruled out and adoption is a possibility for the child, the agency may petition (request) for termination of parents' rights to the child. If the court terminates parental rights it means the child is legally free for adoption. It also means that your biological parents have no legal rights pertaining to the child anymore.

Therapeutic Foster Home

A foster home in which the foster parents or caregivers have specialized training to provide care for children and adolescents who may have emotional or behavioral problems. Also referred to as a "Treatment Foster Home."

Therapist

A person who provides supportive services such as counseling, goal planning and advocacy for youth and families. A therapist has received specialized training and

may be a Social Worker, Psychologist or Psychiatrist.

TPR - (See Termination of Parental Rights)

Transition from Care

When a young person leaves foster care, whether through reunification, adoption, or emancipation. See also Emancipation and Aging Out.

Transition Plan

A structured plan for services and supports for a young person who will emancipate (or "age out") of the foster care system to life on their own. The goal is to assure a young person's safety and health as they adjust to supporting themselves as a young adult.

Transitional Living Program

A service, usually including housing, provided to young people who are in the process of aging out of foster care or have recently emancipated from the system.

Tuition Waiver

A program provide by some states that allows current and former foster youth to attend publicly funded colleges and higher education institutions without paying (or with a substantial reduction of) tuition and fees.

Voluntary Placement

When a parent or guardian makes a decision on their own to place a child in foster care.

Ward (or Ward of the Court)

A child or youth who has a guardian appointed by the court to care for and take responsibility for them. A governmental agency may take temporary custody of a young person if the child is suffering from parental neglect or abuse, or has been in trouble with the law.

Youth Advisory Board

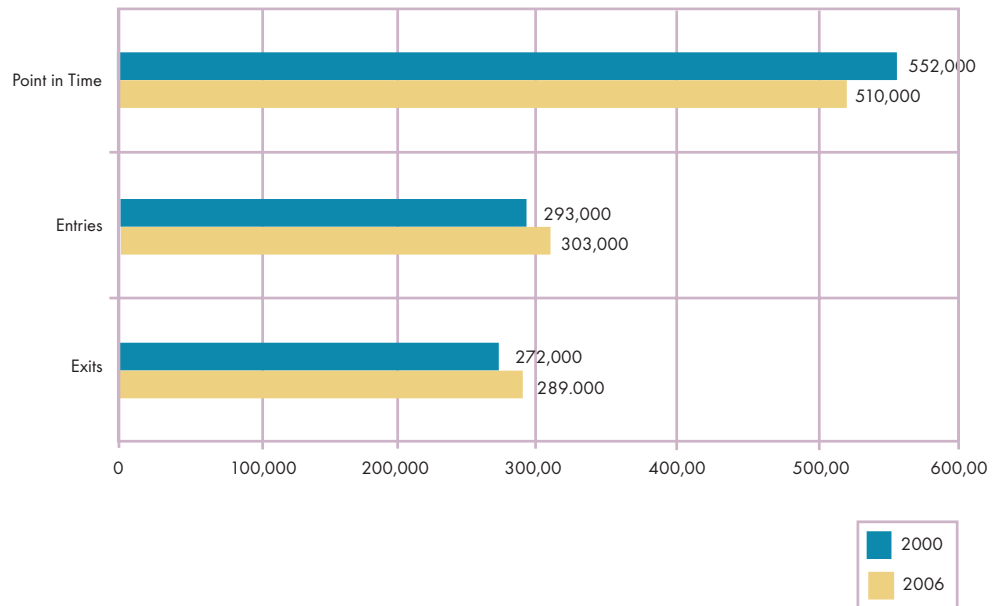
A group of young people who have experienced foster care. The group generally works on issues to improve the system, raise public awareness, or to provide peer support to other foster youth. Sometimes called a Youth Advisory Council.

Did You Know . . . ? Foster Care Facts

A Glimpse into the Current State of Foster Care in the U.S.

Currently, there are an estimated 510,000 children in foster care.^{vi}

**Exhibit 1: Numbers of Children In, Entering, and Exiting Foster Care
FY 2000 and FY 2006**



According to the latest statistics from federal Administration for Children and Families data (2006)^{vii}

- 32 out of 100 foster children are between the ages of 0 and 5
- 28 out of 100 foster children are between the ages of 6 and 12
- 40 out of 100 foster children are between the ages of 13 and 21

The placement settings of children in foster care in 2006 were as follows^{viii}:

Pre-Adoptive Home	3%	17,351
Foster Family Home (Relative)	24%	124,571
Foster Family Home (Non-Relative)	46%	236,911
Group Home	7%	33,433
Institution	10%	53,042
Supervised Independent Living	1%	5,872
Runaway	2%	12,213
Trial Home Visit	5%	26,606

Picture This: Foster Care

What the Entertainment Panelists Said

Dan Fesman, Writer & Supervising Producer, *NCIS*

"Writers are experts on just about any topic you can think of. We must be, because we write hundreds of hours of television about all different topics and we convince millions of people every week that we know what we're talking about - except that we're not really experts. At least I'm not. So what do we do? We research.

Research is a crucial part of the writing process. Good research can really separate a compelling hour of television from something we've probably seen a hundred times. It can separate something that is original and novel from something that furthers stereotypes that unfortunately get perpetrated over and over again on television. I'm here to tell you that we thoroughly and exhaustively research every single aspect of every single plotline and character we ever write when we have the time, which we never do. So what we basically have to do is cheat by using the greatest research tool that's ever been conceived by man and woman - people. People are the best research tool out there. People are better than books. People are better than the Internet. Why? Because people can answer questions and people inherently understand what it is that is dramatic about our lives. It's people who tell stories, and that's why I'm looking forward to talking to people here. I didn't come here to read about statistics and facts. I came here to talk to everybody here about stories. I want to talk to people."

Lyla Oliver, Writer & Producer, *Judging Amy*

"When I was a writer on *Judging Amy*, at the beginning none of us knew anything about welfare or the juvenile justice system. We had to go on fieldtrips, read and do research. But it was really dry until we went to court and watched a judge, went to adoption day and saw real people and were able to see what was happening with their lives. That made all the difference.

When you first start working on a show, you have a lot of energy and you can't wait to write, but you've got to write 24 of them. And so the train starts coming down the track after you. At first, you're walking and then suddenly you're running because you have to catch up with your production schedule.

EIC came and offered to help us meet with kids who had drug problems and are now clean and tell us their experiences. That gave us new juice. Once again, it was people that we were talking to and hearing their experiences. I wasn't good at Math. I was happy in my English class, drifting off and thinking about what was going on in the world. So, when you give me statistics they don't stick, but if we talk about stories - that lands. I care about that."



Dan Fesman



Lyla Oliver



Andrew Wilder



Amanda Green

Andrew Wilder, Writer & Supervising Producer, *Criminal Minds*

"I'd like to get across to everybody in this room that as much creative powers we have, we are but a small piece of the machine. The process by which a TV show gets on the air usually is that one of us will have an idea, we will pair up with a studio, convince that studio to help us secure funding and try to sell it to a network. Then, if you get on the air, there are teams of executives at both studio and network giving the creator notes.

The brutal reality is that when we try and get things into our stories, it comes down to dollars. We are tasked with telling stories that are engaging enough to keep the audience watching through the commercial break, where we sell you soap and beer and cars and medications. At the end of the day, it's a business. As creative and artistic as we can get, that's what we're dealing with.

Essentially, the best strategy, I think, on your part is to get to people who are creating shows, like *Judging Amy*, where from the outset, it's dealing with the content and issues that you are interested in, because trying to get foster care onto a show like *Criminal Minds*, you're not going to be happy with the result. Another effective strategy is getting to people who are starting to create shows. Think about the show that you are targeting for your message, and know that while we are responsible, we are also dealing with increasingly large conglomerate corporations."

Amanda Green, Writer & Co-Executive Producer, *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*

"I won't pretend that every story I write or every story that *SVU* tells is perfect, but what I do try to bring to the shows that I write and supervise is the sense of accountability. When I first started writing, I was drawing on my own experiences in the field with real rape victims, with real child abuse victims, with real families and survivors of homicide. I tried then, and I still try, to be really honest in telling the truth as I lived it.

We are teaching people through television, which is a good thing if we're giving them the right information and a very scary and very awful thing if we're not. If we tell people something on TV that isn't medically accurate and up-to-date, that's a huge responsibility to bear. I think all writers feel and take that kind of responsibility very seriously.

Yes, there are differences in power and access and how we decide what stories we get to tell. Yes, when we're writing crime drama, somebody has to be a killer and somebody has to be the victim. But, if you see us saying something that isn't true, call us on it. If you let a writer know that they were wrong, they wouldn't want to make that mistake again because we do want to be right.

We need to spend as much time as we possibly can doing research so we can be accurate. The best research is people because we're storytellers and so are you. The stories that you tell about your life, about your work, about your experience, you probably only tell to your family, to your friends, at the bar, at the kitchen table or, you know, by the water cooler. Those stories are no different from the stories we're telling. We just tell them to 20 million people at a time."

Mark Goffman, Writer & Supervising Producer, *The Beast*

"Typically, half of all shows that are created are canceled in their first year and half of those that make it to their second year cancel in their second year. So the odds are dramatically in your favor, that if you're lucky enough to get staffed on a show, it's not going to be a job that you have for very long. Most of the shows and most of the writers are working with just a few episodes and trying to do the best they can just to get the show off the ground, and dealing with all different elements from the networks and studios.

One of the director's biggest issues with the line producers is figuring out where to shoot scenes that are written. What looks like a good, appropriate homeless place? What's a good clinic? All of this has to be done in a specific timeframe and with a limited budget because we don't have a budget to go over a day. The process is a challenge. And so, it's sometimes a miracle to me that it works on any level.

For me, what's exciting about being a writer is getting to dive into that world that I don't know anything about and take what grabs me about it and try to translate that into a story. It's very eye-opening for me to research new stories and see that part of the world. Stories are what sticks with me, and I'm excited to hear more of them."



Mark Goffman

Table Facilitators Share Their Thoughts

'In foster care you grow up not knowing you can be somebody. When I was in foster care, I felt I had no future. All kids need a family, to have someone, this is father, this is mother-so they can believe in themselves and grow up to be somebody. This is a big deal that people don't realize. I wish everyone could understand...' These words, spoken 2 decades ago by a teen in foster care, have never left me. There are foster children in every community in America, often invisible, crying inside, lacking the most basic of human needs - connection with a family. To each child this problem is huge - overwhelming - yet nationally, their numbers are small enough that there is a genuine opportunity for caring citizens to make a powerful difference - if only they knew.

Realistic stories that portray foster children living, dreaming, loving, playing, learning and growing offer compelling drama, enjoyable entertainment and valuable education to the public. These efforts would inspire adults to become foster parents or mentors and go a long way towards giving every child the chance to be part of a family - to be "somebody" with a future. The media has an enormous opportunity to be catalysts for healing and hope for the half million children in America's foster care system."

—Susan Hoag Badeau, Director of the Cross Systems Integration,
Casey Family Program

"One of the things young people find most difficult to face about the foster care system is the stigma attached to being a foster kid. The public, including the media, have a lot of prejudiced negative information about children and young adults in care. In reality, foster children and foster youth across America are waging courageous struggles to overcome tragic circumstances in their lives. Media and the community need to take notice."

—Celeste Bodner, Executive Director, Foster Club



Kathi M. Crowe



Rob Woronoff

"There are nearly a half a million children and youth in foster care in the United States. These children need loving families to care for them and to provide a balance to the neglect and abuse that they experienced prior to entering the foster care system.

Most Americans have no first-hand knowledge of the foster care system and therefore rely only on sporadic news coverage on rare occasions when something has gone terribly wrong. These occasions are by far the exception, not the rule and yet, leave the public with a lasting impression that makes them want to distance themselves from the foster care system and children, rather than get involved.

Television writers have an opportunity to assist in the recruitment of families for the half a million children who need caring loving homes by developing story lines that engage the public. We need more Americans to see themselves as potential foster and adoptive parents and therefore to recognize themselves in the portrayals of foster families on television."

—Kathi M. Crowe, Executive Director, National Foster Care Coalition

"The foster care system is broken. According to the US Census Bureau, there are nearly 80 million American households comprised of at least one parent and one child. So why out of nearly 80 million families are there not enough families for 500,000 foster children? People rarely see stories about foster children who go on to achieve great things; who become an attorney named the young lawyer of the year by the American Bar Association, or who become non-profit executive directors or policy directors for US Congressmen or who obtain two masters degrees before the age of 30.

If more positive stories of foster children are told in the media, then the public's perception of foster children will change. Once this happens, surely more families will be willing to offer foster children the love and support that every child deserves. Then neither the system— nor the children who live in it— will be so broken."

—Rob Woronoff, Executive Producer, Defining Media

Acknowledgements

Researching health issues can be as basic as finding research papers on the Internet or as complex as delving into public policy and the philosophical positions of interest groups. Most important is the perspective of people who, for one reason or another, make a deeper commitment by dedicating their time to a cause.

This document is a publication resulting from a formal meeting of experts in the field of foster care as well as representatives of the entertainment industry. Numerous individuals and organizations provided insight into the complex issues surrounding foster care and related concerns as we created *Picture This: Foster Care*.

Special Thanks to:

Adoptive Family Services	Georgetown University
Al-Anon Family Group Headquarters, Inc.	HHS Office on Women's Health
Alliance for Children and Families	Maryland Foster Youth Resource Center
Barker Foundation	Maryland State Foster Parent Association
Buffalo Urban League	National Association of Social Workers
Casey Family Programs	National Association of Counties
Child and Family Services Agency	National Foster Parent Association
Children's Defense Fund	National Urban League
Fairfax County Foster Care and Adoption Program	The Campaign for Youth Justice
Foster Care Alumni of America	United Neighborhood Centers of America
Foster Club Alumni	Youth Crime Watch of America
Generations United	

Extra special thanks to the National Association of Broadcasters for hosting *Picture This: Foster Care*, including Marcellus Alexander, Executive Vice President of Television, NAB; and Robert De Leon, Conference Services Coordinator, Meetings and Conferences. Special thanks also to the Casey Family Programs team who helped make this event possible, including Marianne Bichsel, Managing Director, Communications and Regina Schofield, Managing Director for Public Policy. Thank you to our *Picture This* table facilitators, Susan Hoag Badeau, Director of the Cross Systems Integration, Casey Family Programs; Celeste Bodner, Executive Director, Foster Club; Kathi Crowe, Executive Director, National Foster Care Coalition; and Rob Woronoff, Executive Producer, Defining Media. Thank you also to our *Picture This* entertainment industry panel, Dan Fesman, Writer & Supervising Producer, *NCIS*; Lyla Oliver, Writer & Producer, *Judging Amy*; Andrew Wilder, Writer & Supervising Producer, *Criminal Minds*; Amanda Green, Writer & Co-Executive Producer, *Law and Order: Special Victims Unit*; and Mark Goffman, Writer & Supervising Producer, *The Beast*.



Picture This Team

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EIC appreciates the Casey Family Programs and the National Association of Broadcasters for supporting *Picture This: Foster Care*.



Picture This Media Panelists Andrew Wilder, Amanda Green, Dan Fesman, Mark Goffman and Lyla Oliver

End Notes

ⁱ Luntz, Maslansky. (2008). Communicating About Children. In *First Focus, Big Ideas for Children: Investing in Our Nation's Future*. pp. 226-235.

ⁱⁱ <http://www.mnadopt.org/Factsheets/Adoption%20and%20Foster%20Care-Five%20Common%20Myths%20Uncovered.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://74.125.47.132/search?q=cache:SVNrd5isyEJ:www.nationaladoptionday.org/2006/media/materials/Background/Myths%2520%26%2520Facts-Adoption.doc+myth+foster+care&cd=4&hl=en&ct=clnk&gl=us>

^{iv} www.adoptioninstitute.org/survey/Adoption_Atitudes_Survey.pdf

^v <http://www.fosterclub.com/glossary>

^{vi} <http://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/factsheets/foster.cfm#one>

^{vii} <http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/systems/afcars/about.htm>

^{viii} http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report14.htm



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