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TUCSON AREA FOSTER CARE ALUMNI HOLD FIRST EVER “FAMILY REUNION”

Attendees Highlight Needs of Arizona’s Children in Foster Care and Look to Congress to Improve Nation’s Foster Care System

TUCSON, AZ —Young people and adults gathered today in Tucson to attend the first annual “Together 2008: Alumni Family Reunion.” Organized by Foster Care Alumni of America, this event was created for, and attended by, individuals who spent time in Arizona’s foster care system.

“All too often, youth in Arizona and across the nation who are placed in foster care are separated from brothers and sisters, friends and family,” said Nathan Monell, executive director of Foster Care Alumni of America. “Most foster care alumni will never be invited to a family reunion or other traditional family gatherings. They will never eat favorite family recipes, play a game of whiffle ball, or sit around and share stories about the past. Today’s event transforms the classic family reunion into a community event, creating lasting memories for many of the 12 million foster care alumni nationwide.”

In Arizona today, there are almost 10,000 children in foster care. They will spend an average of more than two years in foster care and over 40% will experience three or more placements. In 2006, 518 young people “aged out” of foster care in Arizona without a family to rely on or a home to return to.

Today’s event, held at Fort Lowell Park, was attended by local alumni of the foster care system along with foster parents, professionals, administrators, and community members who care about foster care. In addition, Foster Care Alumni Family Reunions took place today across the nation in states including: California, Washington, Texas, Maryland, Virginia and Pennsylvania.

“It feels so special to finally have a family reunion because now I can connect with the family I never had,” said Eshawn-Fonta Peterson, of Tucson, who spent nine years in foster care and attended today’s family reunion. “I want my brothers and sisters to know that, though we aren’t ‘traditional’ or ‘nuclear,’ we are still family!”

A landmark child welfare bill passed on Wednesday by the House of Representatives could make a huge difference for many children and youth in foster care today. The Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act will ensure that more children can leave foster care for permanent families through adoption and guardianship, that fewer youth will “age out” of the system with no one to rely on, and that children in foster care will have improved health and educational outcomes. This bill, the most sweeping federal legislation in more than a decade, is now being considered by the Senate.

The honorary host committee for the Foster Care Alumni Family Reunion includes Representatives Jim McDermott (D-WA); Jerry Weller (R-IL); Shelley Berkley (D-NV), Chaka Fattah (D-PA), Dennis Cardoza (D-CA), Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA), and William C. Bell, President and CEO of Casey Family Programs.

“The Foster Care Alumni of America have been great partners in our efforts to reform foster care and adoption and improve the systems for children and caregivers,” said Congressman Weller (R-IL), one of the co-authors of the Fostering Connections to Success Act and an honorary host committee member for today’s event. “It is an honor to have the support of the Alumni and an honor to be on the host committee for today's event.”

In addition to Foster Care Alumni of America, sponsors of the Alumni Family Reunion include Casey Family Programs, The Pew Charitable Trusts, Clark & Allen, P.C., Clarke & Sampson, Inc., Virginia Commerce Bank, Renner and Company Certified Public Accountants, and Focus Data Solutions.

About Foster Care Alumni of America: In 2004, foster care alumni and advocates created a national non-profit association that brings together the expertise and experience of adults who have experienced foster care. Foster Care Alumni of America (FCAA) was formed to engage the more than 12 million alumni of foster care and to advocate for the needs of the youth and alumni of foster care.

FCAA has more than 1,700 members from all 50 states. Through FCAA, alumni of foster care hope to create the ability to connect with one another in an organized and well-supported community and to use alumni expertise to transform the foster care system.

FCAA's mission seeks to provide innovation in the federal and state child welfare systems and effective and meaningful partnerships with child welfare organizations. FCAA has confidence that it can partner with others to reduce the numbers of children and youth in foster care and can improve the foster care experience through investments of their expertise and energy.

For more information on Foster Care Alumni of America, please visit our website at www.fostercarealumni.org.

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