



SPRING 2007 - VOL1

# Connecting Today... Transforming Tomorrow

## Walk with the Dreamers

By Nathan Monell, FCAA Executive Director and ally member

*"Walk with the dreamers, the believers, the courageous,  
the cheerful, the planners, the doers, the successful people  
with their heads in the clouds and their feet on the ground.*

*Let their spirit ignite a fire within you to leave this world  
better than when you found it."*

Wilferd Peterson

One of the reasons I was attracted to Foster Care Alumni of America was the strong commitment and courage demonstrated by our founders who believed that the foster care system deserved to have a strong consumer voice. Their vision as dreamers, believers, planners and doers laid the foundation for successes that are finally coming to fruition.

There are all kinds of firsts happening for FCAA and our members are actively making those happen with us!

- At the end of 2006 we started our first membership campaign. By the end of this year we are committed to reaching more than 2,000 members. Have you invited your friends and colleagues to join? Is your business or agency an organizational member?
- Our first chapters have been chartered. Congratulations to our members in Florida, Ohio, and Arizona who have established our inaugural chapters through their hard work. Applications for new chapters will be available this Fall and twice annually into the future.
- FCAA has received commitments of \$140,000 in new foundation funding and has submitted proposals for \$150,000 more. Each time we receive funding through grants and through support from our members, it allows us to grow our program offerings as an association, and to make a difference for all people in and from foster care.
- Two states and one private foster care provider have agreed to buy memberships for three years for every youth who transitions out of care to ensure that they are linked with a caring and supportive community.

If you are a dreamer, a believer, a planner or a doer, we invite you to walk with us on this journey so we all leave this world better than how we found it.

### What's Inside:

FCAA Member Perspective:  
Too Broken to be Fixed?  
**PAGE 2**

Lessons from Alumni  
**PAGE 2**

FCAA Sponsors a  
Foster Care All-Star  
**PAGE 3**

Get Involved!  
What You Can Do Now  
**PAGE 4**



## LESSONS FROM ALUMNI

By Misty Stenslie, FCAA Deputy Director and alumna member

Through our community art project, Exploring the Culture of Foster Care, we've received submissions of postcard art from members all over the country. These submissions describe the insights, experiences, and lessons learned through the experience of having lived in foster care.

There are a number of themes that come through loud and clear. Through our project, you will see what our members want each other, young people in care, and our allies to know about our experiences and our culture.

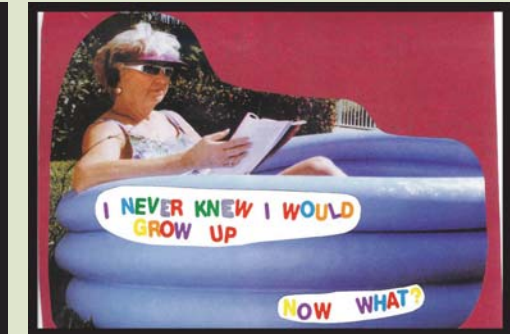
If you'd like to see more postcards, visit our website. We will soon have a poster featuring some of our postcard submissions available for sale! **Please contact us at [admin@fostercarealumni.org](mailto:admin@fostercarealumni.org) to place your order or learn more about the project, including how you can participate!**



*As alumni, we understand how easy it is to feel angry, victimized, and lost through the experiences that led us to foster care and the experiences we had in care. **Our hope for each other and for those who come after us is that we find the strength, courage, and support we need to come out of these challenges with wisdom, hope, and love.***



*We know that there are major (and often lasting) emotional and behavioral consequences of the experiences we've faced, but it's important for the professionals and foster parents who care for youth to remember that we are adjusting to our lives and attaching to people as well as we can, based on what our experiences have taught us. **Please don't assume we are broken just because our lives have been.***



*It is both developmentally normal and a symptom of growing up in placement that young people don't have a clear vision of the future. We've learned that it's part of the culture of foster care to find in our adult lives that we aren't sure what is supposed to happen next. **The alumni community is here to provide that extended family for all of us as we figure out the answer to that question in each of our lives.***

### ALUMNI:

adults (18 years and older) who have spent time in foster care or other out-of-home placement.

### ALLIES:

adults who did not live in care, but who value alumni expertise and want to join with us to improve the lives of people in and from foster care.

### FCAA Member Perspective:

## Too Broken To Be Fixed?

By Rhonda Sciortino, CEO of Child Welfare Insurance Services and FCAA Alumna Member

"Too Broken to be Fixed" was the title of a workshop sponsored by a nationally recognized child advocacy organization...



Over the past twenty years in the course of insuring homes and services for abused children, I've attended many conferences and workshops, all with the same undercurrent of depressing thought. Just once I wanted to hear someone say, **"It's not perfect, but it does work."** It appeared to me that the wise and sophisticated among us felt it their duty to constantly beat the drum of all that's wrong with foster care, and if they let up ever-so-slightly on that mantra, the emphasis on the need would immediately fade out of focus, funding would dry up, and all hard-won gains would slip away.

I have lobbied with other child advocates on the state and national level over the past twenty years, and I am keenly aware of the importance of consistent emphasis to legislators of the need for increased funds. I'm also aware that the repetitive negativity is a slap in the face to all the wonderful, selfless people who make personal sacrifices day and night, with no vacations and no time off, for children they didn't create. In addition to dealing with kids with severe behavioral issues, some foster families deal with ungrateful and dysfunctional birth families who scream at them for issues outside their control, and they are criticized and scrutinized by neighbors, social workers, and sometimes even family and friends.

For years I listened, without speaking up, to the prevalent negativity by the child care professionals around me. Without a degree in social work, psychology, or other related field, I figured I shouldn't contradict the "experts." It recently occurred to me, however, that given the fact that I spent the first 16 years of my life as a dependent of the court and all of my adult life insuring foster family agencies, I am qualified. And perhaps I have a responsibility to say, **"Sure, there's room for improvement, but on balance there are far more successes than tragedies.** The problem is, typically, what's printed by the media is tragedy."

Some people do become foster parents for the money. But those who make their foster children part of their family frequently spend more than their expense reimbursement on providing not only what the youth need, but often things that will **make them feel special, wanted, and worthy.**

Continued on Page 4

## FCAA Sponsors an All-Star

Foster Care Alumni of America is proud to sponsor an '07 FosterClub AllStar.



Lupe Tovar, FCAA alumna member from AZ and 2005 FosterClub All-Star



Aaron Weaver, FCAA alumnus member from NE and 2006 FosterClub All-Star

The FosterClub All-Star Program provides leadership and service opportunities to young people, ages 18-24, who have spent their formative years in foster care. For young adults who have beaten the odds, and thrived in spite of difficult circumstances, the All-Star internship is an opportunity to communicate their unique perspectives and **share their resilient spirits with their younger peers still struggling through foster care.** In addition to participating in dozens of youth events across the country over the summer, the FosterClub All-Stars will advocate for system improvement and promote public awareness nationally throughout the year.

This year, 12 young people from the foster care system will be chosen as FosterClub All-Stars. They will spend their summer in Portland, Oregon receiving intensive leadership and public speaking training, and then will be dispatched in teams to teen conferences and foster care-related

events across the country. In addition to motivating and supporting foster youth across America, the FosterClub All-Stars will **raise awareness about the 530,000 children presently in foster care, and specifically the 24,000 youth who transition from foster care every year, mostly without the support of a permanent and stable family.**

In addition to supporting this wonderful, empowering program, sponsorship will provide FCAA the opportunity to inform the All-Stars about the work of FCAA and to involve these young leaders in spreading the word to thousands of youth across the country.

For more information, visit [www.fosterclub.org](http://www.fosterclub.org).

# What You Can Do Now! *Great ways to get involved and make a difference!*

## Join FCAA Today!

If you are not already a member of Foster Care Alumni of America, please JOIN FCAA TODAY. Whether you are an alumnus or an ally, your expertise is important and your voice is needed. Please join our community and work with us to improve the lives of people in and from foster care.

### COMING SOON:

- Interactive member areas on our website

- Exploring the Culture of Foster Care poster of submissions to our community art project

- Even more opportunities to Connect Today...Transform Tomorrow through our member affinity groups (you sign up for these in your new member survey)

To Join FCAA, visit  
<http://www.fostercarealumni.org/membdrive/jointoday.html>

## Support foster youth in college!

As part of the Band Together project (learn more at [www.fosterclub.com/grownups/bandtogether.cfm](http://www.fosterclub.com/grownups/bandtogether.cfm)) in celebration of May—National Foster Care Month—we're collecting gift certificates for alumni who are in college. Show your support by gathering and sending to our office gift cards and certificates to national stores like McDonald's, Starbucks, Amazon.com, Target, Taco Bell, Wal-Mart, etc. We encourage you to get your friends and families involved, particularly the youth in your lives.

Did your family do these kinds of things for you as a young adult? Do you wish they had? You CAN make a difference! Send your gift cards or cash donations to our office.

## Have your story included in the upcoming book, *From Foster Care to Anywhere!*

If you experienced foster care and you're now self-sufficient, please consider participating in the creation of the book, *From Foster Care to Anywhere!* This book will be published and distributed throughout the US as a compilation of stories of people who, despite having experienced abuse, abandonment, or neglect, have survived and are thriving.

This book will encourage others who are still trying to get on their feet that they can do it. It'll let employers know that people who have survived a traumatic childhood can be the most determined and ambitious employees. And it'll let the world know who we are and why we do some of the things we do to survive, cope, and take care of ourselves.

If you're interested in participating in this project, contact Rhonda Sciortino, a member of Foster Care Alumni of America, at [helpfosterkids@cox.net](mailto:helpfosterkids@cox.net).

## Electronically mentor a foster youth or alumnus!

Orphan Foundation of America is an organizational member of FCAA. OFA is the home of the vMentor Program—an online mentoring program for foster youth and alumni in high school, college and vocational training programs across the country. It couples trained adult mentors with young people based on career, academic and extracurricular interests, ethnic background and gender. Housed on a state-of-the-art proprietary web portal vMentor provides a safe, protected forum for communication between parties, monitored at all times by OFA. Mentors undergo rigorous pre-service training and are supported by a 1-800 help line, monthly conference calls and a dedicated case manager. The commitment is two years of weekly emails to one student, and most matches develop into healthy, supportive relationships cherished by student and mentor alike. With a background in foster care, what could be a better way to give back than to encourage and support one special young person through their post-secondary education? Matches are generally made in the autumn after each new school year starts. For more information on this exciting program, visit [www.vmentor.com](http://www.vmentor.com)

## Too Broken To Be Fixed?

continued from Page 2

The prevalent negativity is also an insult to those of us who have come out of foster care and are independent, self-sufficient, and positively contributing to society in our own way. We are not all celebrities, athletes, or millionaire entrepreneurs, but we're not all felons either.

Many people who experience serious pain as children become strong adults who can survive just about anything life throws their way.

Learning coping techniques at an early age allows us to deal with the most severe challenges of childhood abandonment, neglect, abuse, and molestation. Those same coping mechanisms eventually have to be swapped for a different set of skills that include

how to get along peacefully with others and making right choices for our lives. Still, it is important that we never lose sight of the fact that we are survivors. What we've survived has equipped us and qualified us to deal with circumstances that could throw the average person into a tailspin.

I know from experience what I'm talking about on this subject. I was abandoned as a very young child, raised by a mentally ill man and an alcoholic woman who beat me, humiliated me, burned me, and provided a bizarre upbringing. As a result, for many years I was a hard, cold, "take-no-prisoners" person. I let nothing and no one stand in the way of achieving my goals.

I used what I'd learned to create the life I wanted to have. **Now, almost thirty years after emancipating, I am a successful business owner, investor, philanthropist, and child advocate.** More importantly, I'm happy and peaceful, and I have excellent relationships with others. I truly enjoy my life. Because we live in the USA, the same opportunities afforded me are available to anyone who will take the necessary steps to achieve his or her personal goals. The keys to using our past experience to our benefit are:

1. Recognize that we are strong, capable survivors
2. Forgive those who have hurt us and forgive ourselves for the role we think we played in the mess
3. Take responsibility for changing our futures
4. Treat people well
5. Make the right choices

It's simple, but it's not always easy. I did it. You can too.

## Why I'm a Member of FCAA...

*I was a foster child from 1930-1941. I'm 82 now and I know that the problems in the system are much the same now. I want to revamp the entire system!*  
Elizabeth (Betty) R. Lawrence, alumni member, NJ

*My wife and I are adoptive parents of ten children, eight of whom spent time in foster care in their early years. One of my orienting philosophies of adoptive parenting is, "There is nothing more damning to the soul of a child than impermanence."*  
Bart Fletcher, ally member, MN

*What is family, if not people with a shared experience caring for and standing with one another? FCAA has the potential to grow into that rare entity that transforms lives on both the individual AND institutional level. As an ally, I am proud to stand with and learn from the powerful individuals who have emerged from the experience of foster care.*  
Chris Trout, ally member, ME

*I recently asked someone, how am I expected to survive in this world without a family. It was recommended that perhaps I join FCAA.*  
John, alumni member, PA

## A few things we've learned from your membership surveys...

- 80% are alumni members, 20% are ally members
- Youngest members: 18 Oldest member: 82
- Average amount of time alumni members spent in care: 8 years
- Number of states where we have FCAA members: 47 plus Washington, DC
- Top priorities of our members: to have a permanent community and to make a difference