

SUMMER 2007 - VOL1

Connecting Today... Transforming Tomorrow

A Place to Call Home

By Bill Stanton, FCAA Board of Directors Chair and alumni member

On behalf of FCAA's Board of Directors, I'd like to thank you for your support and your voice in building our organization and the alumni movement. We value each of you and are proud to count you among our members.

I am honored to serve as Chair of the FCAA board and bring with me numerous perspectives. Over the last 25 years I've worked to improve the foster care system. I began my career working in the field of juvenile probation, specifically with youth who were delinquent and dependent. I've served as the Division Director of the AZ Supreme Court, supervising 5 programs in the state for many years. I now work as a consultant to the federal Children's Bureau, advocating for improvements in the child welfare agency and the courts. My wife, Debbie, and I have two daughters. In addition we are also a foster family. We now have a 5 month old son, TJ.



I, like most of you, am an alumnus of foster care. I went through 14 years in New York's foster care system in the 1950s and 60s. I carry with me through my work, my own experiences as well as those of the other youth, alumni, foster families, and professionals I've known after a lifetime of involvement.

I spent many of my years in foster care waiting for the chance to go home, hearing the promises from my parents that it would be just a little longer. When I was about 13, I finally realized that I would not be going home. I still held onto the hope, but came to realize the reality. It was about that time I finally let myself become part of the family who raised me. They are still my family and I am thankful each day that despite the hard times and many, many challenges, they never gave up on me. (Continued on Page 6)



FCAA Celebrates Alumni Interns

FCAA hosted a celebration event for the 36 alumni who are interning in Washington DC this summer through the Orphan Foundation of America and the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute.

Photo by Gediyon Kifle

What's Inside:

Exploring the Culture
of Foster Care
PAGE 2

Member Perspective:
She Chose Us
PAGE 3

Our Members in Print
PAGE 3

Opportunities to get Involved
PAGE 4

Our Members in the News
PAGE 5

Organizational Updates
PAGE 7



She Chose Us

By Kelly Bradley, FCAA ally member

Eighteen, being kicked out of her foster home so another foster child could have her bed, and 2 months pregnant. Where was Laurie to go? She had no family, no one to want her. She'd been in foster care since she was 2 years old and no one had found her a forever family.

That's when she came to us. We'd known Laurie since she was 12 years old, but she didn't really know us. Laurie was a foster child we secretly mentored. Whenever she needed something, we secretly provided it through her CASA worker-clothes, haircuts, birthday and holiday gifts. Slowly, we began meeting with her so she could come to know us.

Alone, pregnant and scared, we brought Laurie home and our family welcomed her. Six months later and 8 months pregnant, Laurie asked if we could adopt her. She explained that she wanted a family and she wanted her baby to have a family. She chose us to be her parents, her baby's grandparents, her FOREVER family.

We didn't know you could adopt an adult, but an attorney friend helped us. Our adoption day was nothing less than amazing! We had 2 judges perform the adoption. These two judges had been Laurie's dependency judges for the past 16 years and felt personally responsible that the system had failed her. What a sight to see those two judges crying, a pregnant Laurie being adopted, and a large family there to welcome her home!

I was at the birth of my grandchild and both she and Laurie have been with us ever since. Laurie is learning how to be part of a family—she never had one, so how can we expect her to know! She's learning to be a good mother. She now believes we will always be here for her and for baby RJ.

People think Laurie's the lucky one, but WE are the lucky ones! We have two more hearts to love and to love us. They are both a gift. Laurie found her own forever family.

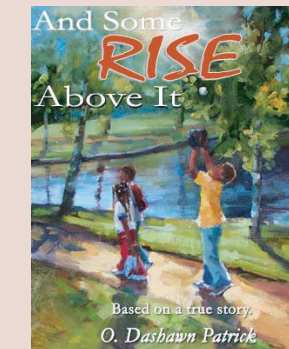
Our stories in print...

Many FCAA members are published authors. We are proud to feature our members' work. Both of these books are available through your favorite online bookseller.

And Some Rise Above It

By Dashawn Patrick, FCAA alumni member

And Some Rise Above It is an amalgam of friendship, love, tragedy, laughter and life changing decisions. It is a book that melds the pleasures and pains of life into one. As the characters are introduced, so too are the perils each must overcome. Follow as they face life altering decisions, but how will their choices mold their destiny? Why do some conquer the perils of life, while others collapse from its pressures?



This true account of Dashawn's journey from the foster care system in Washington in the 1980s to life as a husband, a father, a professional baseball player, and now an author is an inspiration. This is a wonderful book to share with those who either are in or from foster care and those who care about young people and alumni.

Returnable Girl

By Pamela Lowell, FCAA ally member



Abandoned. That's how thirteen-year-old Ronnie Hartman feels after her mother and Kenny (her mother's good-for-nothing boyfriend) move to Alaska, bringing Ronnie's two younger brothers with them and leaving her behind.

"Returned" from one foster home after another because of her impulsive lying and stealing, Ronnie is eventually placed with a foster mom named Alison, whose job is to rehabilitate her so Ronnie doesn't end up in some awful residential treatment center.

As she continues to yearn for her family, an important letter presents Ronnie with the most heart-wrenching decision of her life: to stay with Alison, who wants to adopt her, or return to the mother who once abandoned her.

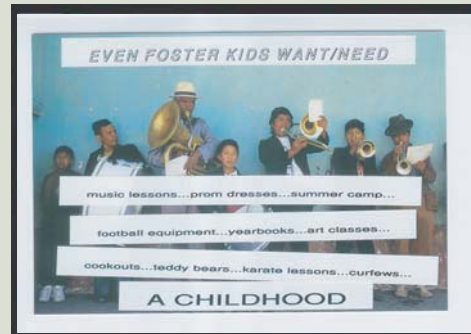
This work of fiction by experienced therapist and compassionate author, Pamela Lowell, highlights the challenges faced by youth and families involved in the foster care system as well as the best that foster care has to offer.

Through our national community project, Exploring the Culture of Foster Care, we've received submissions of postcard art from people in and from foster care all over the country. These cards describe the insights, experiences, and lessons learned through the experience of having lived in foster care. **See what youth and alumni of care have to say...**

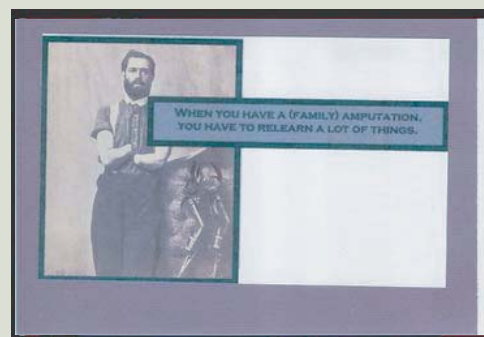
If you'd like to see more postcards, visit our website. We now have a poster featuring our postcards available for sale! **Please contact us at admin@fostercarealumni.org to place your order or learn more about the project, including how you can participate!**

EXPLORING THE CULTURE OF FOSTER CARE

By Misty Stenslie, FCAA Deputy Director and
alumni member



"The state" is not a good parent. We have often been "protected" by the rules within the foster care system in a way that overlooks normal parts of childhood. Young people need opportunities to try new things, have sleepovers and field trips, take some well-balanced risks. Lighting a fire of passion will often make it unnecessary to put out fires of crisis. Please support our interests, skills, strengths and dreams, and help us connect with each other.



Losing family—whatever family means to the young person—requires major adaptation. This doesn't come naturally, but is a process of trial and error. It is also a process of enormous grief for both the actual loss and the loss of the fantasy.



For too many young people and alumni, trash bags serve as our luggage. Please don't stand by quietly when this happens. And remember, you never know what a young person will cram into his plastic bag—either figuratively or literally. Please be sure that you are helping young people to pack hope, pride, fun, laughter, tenacity, and options with them for their journey.

Visit the Exploring the Culture of Foster Care Online Gallery
at <http://www.fostercarealumni.org>

FCAA is seeking volunteer newsletter editor for Fall edition!

We are looking for a member with expertise in proofreading print materials to serve as the guest editor of our Fall newsletter. We anticipate it will take approximately 20 hours of time in the months of August and September to help with proofreading.

If you are skilled and interested in this area,
please let us know at admin@fostercarealumni.org.

Opportunities to get Involved

FCAA Chapters

We currently have three chapters of Foster Care Alumni of America: Arizona, Florida, and Ohio. Chapters of FCAA work toward our mission of Connecting Today...Transforming Tomorrow in their states. Some examples of the work of our chapters:

- In June, members of FCAA FL Chapter and Florida Youth SHINE (our organizational member and partner) presented on the topic of changing the culture of foster care to more than 150 child welfare administrators from across the state. They also presented to the Committee on Families, Children and the Courts established by the state's Chief Justice. On both occasions, they shared the slideshow of postcards from our community art project and presented a poster featuring our postcards to Chief Justice Lewis, Secretary of Children and Families Bob Butterworth and Governor Charlie Crist.
- FCAA OH Chapter has been busy across the state! They presented workshops for youth and for foster parents at the annual Statewide Foster Parent Conference, and have had a lead role in planning for the upcoming statewide Independent Living Summit for young people in transition. Members of the OH Chapter will be leading workshops at the national It's My Life Conference in Atlanta this fall.
- Our newly established AZ Chapter is gearing up to organize across the state with hubs in the northern and southern parts of AZ. They will soon be surveying FCAA members who live in AZ to identify the top priorities along with member interests and skills. From there, the Chapter will hold elections for officers and will kick off their first initiatives!

If you would like to be part of one of our chapters, drop us a line at admin@fostercarealumni.org. If you are interested in developing a new chapter in your state, please contact us for more information! We'll be publishing applications for our next chapters later this summer and we'd like a chapter where you live!

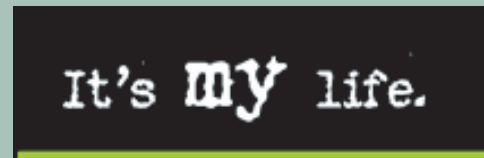
Help young people in your state or agency get connected with FCAA!

Are you an employee of a state or private child welfare agency working with young people in transition from foster care to adulthood? FCAA is working with agencies to provide gift memberships to FCAA as a support for youth in transition. For more information about how to make this valuable service available where you work, contact Misty at mstenslie@fostercarealumni.org.



Faith and Foster Care Documentary

FCAA alumni member, Alex Lyons, is leading efforts through his church and employer to develop a documentary about how faith can impact change, lead to hope, and model healthy ideas of finances, relationships, and family. This documentary, "Faith and Foster Care," looks to explore issues of faith -- both positive and negative--along the journey of foster care alumni. It seeks to bring awareness to the issue of neglected and abused children, and will seek to motivate the government to look at faith-based organizations as viable options for healthy mentoring, acknowledging that child welfare in America was founded upon organizations of faith. For more information, contact Alex at alex.j.lyons@gmail.com.



It's My Life Conference September 30 - October 2, 2007

Are you planning to attend the national It's My Life conference in Atlanta from September 30-October 2?

Would you like to volunteer with FCAA during the conference? We'll be hosting the hospitality suite (open to all, especially to the 400 youth and alumni participants) at the conference and will also have an exhibit there and we need volunteers!

If you're interested, contact Misty at mstenslie@fostercarealumni.org.

For more information about this wonderful conference that brings together youth in foster care, alumni, caregivers, practitioners and advocates to create synergy in sharing innovative practices designed to guide preparation for adulthood services for youth aging out of foster care, visit the conference site here: <http://www.casey.org/Resources/Projects/ItsMyLife/>

Share Your Opinions and Experiences with Health and Mental Health Care

FCAA is teaming up with our organizational partner, the American Academy of Pediatrics, to gather information about the opinions and experiences of young people, alumni, foster parents, and foster care professionals in accessing and using health and mental health care. Please complete our survey to tell us about what you wish health professionals knew about youth in foster care, what you want to be sure health professionals provide to young people in care, and the challenges and strengths of the health and mental health services available to youth in care. To complete the survey, visit <http://www.fostercarealumni.org>.



Share our Community Art Project to inform and influence

We now have posters of our postcard project available. When you completed your new member survey, you had the opportunity to get one as a thank you gift. The posters are also for sale at \$5/each for members and \$10/each for nonmembers. If you are part of a youth/alumni group that is interested in using the posters as a fundraiser, please call our office for information. If you'd like an electronic copy of the postcard slideshow, let us know—that is available to our members at no charge.

Be part of Casey Family Programs' Story Bank

FCAA is working with our founding sponsor, Casey Family Programs, to build a powerful collection of stories that highlight alumni of foster care, foster parents, kin caregivers, birth parents and others who have stories to tell about their lives in the child welfare system, and to provide a much-needed voice, and perspective, to media outlets locally, regionally and nationally. Participants in the Story Bank will receive a \$50 honorarium. If you'd like to get involved, please contact Ron Jenkins at rjenkins@casey.org or (800) 346-9669, Extension 14250

Our Members in the News

FCAA Board Member **Michelle (Mickey) McKinney** was honored with a Foster Care Awareness Month Heroes award in Los Angeles County. Mickey has been a tireless advocate and support for young people in transition from the foster care and probation systems to adulthood. Mickey is a living testament to the power of the human spirit to overcome adversity and to turn those experiences into real positive change.

A number of our members have been featured in national news stories about the issues facing young people in foster care or in transition from foster care to adulthood. These include: **Lupe Tovar** in Parade Magazine, **Tyler Bacon** in USA Today, and **Judge Cindy Lederman** on NPR.



Dr. Sharon McDaniel-Lowe received the Angels in Adoption Award from the Congressional Coalition on Adoption Institute. This award gives all members of US Congress the opportunity to recognize and acknowledge the work of people who enrich the lives of youth in care. "As an alumna of foster care, a kin caregiver, and an advocate working to positively affect the lives of the hundreds of thousands of youth in foster care in this nation, I am blessed to be honored with this award" said Dr. McDaniel-Lowe.

Ruth Massinga Award

Several FCAA members were given the Ruth Massinga Award, which honors the extraordinary efforts of those who dedicate themselves to improving the lives of youth in care.

Latrice Ware, alumni member was honored for her work in founding and leading the Washington, DC-based Youth Business Initiative, an organization that works in partnership with nonprofits, business and government to promote growth and success for youth in foster care. Latrice also works to train foster parents. Latrice is the proud mother of two beautiful girls.



Our Members in the News

Continued from Page 5

Christa Drake was recognized as a leader and community advocate throughout AZ and the US. Christa is the executive director of In My Shoes, an Arizona organization which matches youth in transition with alumni of foster care as mentors. Christa is a wife, a mother, a foster parent working toward adoption, a leader of the FCAA chapter in AZ, and a founder of the national alumni movement.



FCAA's Board Chair, **Bill Stanton**, was also a recipient of the Ruth Massinga Award. In addition, FCAA alumni members **Julie Palmer, Melanie Oyler, Lupe Ortiz-Tovar, Melinda Dennington, Owen Bunstine, Megan Anthoney, Anita Alston, Jelani Freeman, Tammi Stoos,** and **Kamika Whetstone** were all nominees for this prestigious award.

A Place to Call Home

Continued from Page 1

On August 16, 2004, my biological mother passed away. Although I had spent some time with her before she died, nothing could have prepared me for my reaction when I received the call that day. After I hung up the phone, I sat on my bed and the first thought that came to my head was, "I guess I am never really going home". Where this came from I have no idea. I am a middle aged man with my own family and the home we've made. I had not thought of her as my mother, but somewhere deep down inside, that child in me still held on to the hope that had always been there.

As I meet some of the other 12 million alumni of foster care in the US, I realize that we all carry with us these pieces of where we came from. I realize that we have so many shared experiences, often including this abiding longing for a place to call home. I can see clearly both the places where foster care has provided the care and nurturing that we needed and where foster care has failed us. Most of us have experienced both sides of that equation.

Through FCAA, we are working to harness the experience and expertise we gained through living in the system to make sure that more of the best that foster care has to offer happens for more youth. We feel a responsibility to those who come after us—both as citizens, and also as the older generations of brothers and sisters who share the government as parents. Working together with our allies—those people who didn't live in foster care but who join with us to improve the lives of people in and from care—we are making a real difference.

Even as FCAA becomes more and more effective in meeting our mission to connect the community of alumni and to transform the foster care system, we probably won't take away that sense of missing out on 'a real home'. What we can do, though, is create a giant extended family network for all of us, a central place where we can know each other and share our victories and our challenges. We can influence practice and policy so that the youth coming after us don't spend years wondering what will happen next.

I'd like to leave you with one of the most important lessons I have ever learned—this one from my high school track coach who said to me, **"Don't let the fact that you are a foster child become your excuse for failure but rather what drives you to succeed."** I want every person connected to the foster care system to know and believe that being a foster child is not a ticket to failure. The fact that we've survived the abuse and/or neglect that caused our removal in the first place, that we've made it through the changes in placement, the difficulties with self-esteem and relationships, the labels and stereotypes—this is PROOF that we are strong. If we can survive all of this, there isn't much that society can throw at us that we can't handle. As more and more of us band together, we can handle it all more smoothly and we can make sure that our brothers and sisters who follow us will have less that they have to 'handle'.

ARKANSAS CONTEST!

FCAA has already recruited members in 49 states, DC, London, the West Indies, and Canada. Yet, we don't have any members in Arkansas! So, we are holding a contest. FCAA will give a poster, a lapel pin, and a t-shirt in celebration of hitting this important milestone and dinner for two to both the first member from Arkansas and the first person who refers a member from Arkansas. Both will featured in our Fall newsletter. So, let's get going!

Organizational Updates

Recent accomplishments at FCAA...

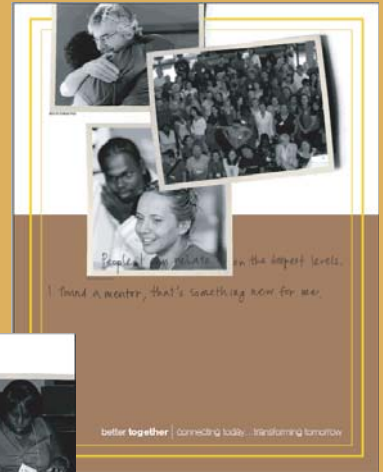
- We have received commitments from the states of Arizona and Indiana and from Casey Family Programs in Arizona to purchase 3-year gift memberships in FCAA for young people aging out of their programs! If your state or organization is interested in providing this valuable gift, please contact us.
- As of July 15, 2007, FCAA has received more than \$10,000 in contributions specifically to sponsor membership dues waivers for those who need them!
- Our members have presented our Community Art Project to several hundred professionals, foster parents, youth and alumni around the country, increasing their knowledge about the experiences of people in and from foster care.
- FCAA received a commitment of \$50,000 in 2007 from Pew Charitable Trust for the development and implementation of our Speaker's Bureau and Writer's Bureau. Please watch for your opportunity to participate!
- We have exhibited at the National Foster Parent Association conference, the National CASA Conference, and the Pathways to Adulthood Conference. We also presented at statewide conferences in Florida and Ohio.
- FCAA's Executive Director, Nathan Monell, serves on the All Children All Families National Advisory Board through the Human Rights Campaign, working to broaden the availability of loving, well-supported families for all children.
- We were featured in a story by Black America Web, were chosen as the Charity of the Month by a VA radio station, and have been cited in several newspaper stories.
- The Annie E. Casey Foundation has granted FCAA \$40,000 for 2007 and \$50,000 for 2008 to support membership development and services.
- We have established a page on Facebook where members are interacting and sharing information every day. Please join us there!
- FCAA is participating on the Task Force on Foster Care through the American Academy of Pediatrics, developing strategies, tools, and information to ensure that health needs are adequately and appropriately met for all young people in and from foster care.
- We worked with the University of IL Children and Family Research Center on the development of Time for Reform: Too Many Birthdays in Foster Care, a Pew Charitable Trusts' publication that provides basic information about foster care in the United States, including stories from many alumni of foster care. Please visit our website to download the publication or call our office for hard copies.

Coming soon to FCAA...

- FCAA will publish a national call to groups interested in becoming the next FCAA chapters—watch your email and our website!
- Our website will have a major update to include interactive opportunities for our members, and enhanced postcard gallery and expanded information available to all!
- FCAA is hosting media training in August where members of our staff, our board, and each of our chapters will learn about effectively working with the media to raise awareness about foster care and to get the general public involved in our efforts to improve practice and policy in foster care.
- We will distribute the film Foster Stories by our alumni member, Sasha Isaac-Young, which documents the lives of several young people and alumni of care.
- We will be hosting 4 young alumni interns in our office this summer through the Youth Business Initiative in Washington, DC. Our interns will be focused on developing tools for engaging younger alumni as members of our organization, active members of our community, and agents for change in the system.
- We will publish a handbook about Strategic Sharing—that is, sharing your experiences in a meaningful, effective, and safe way in order to influence practice and policy in child welfare.
- We will implement plans for our Speaker's and Writer's Bureaus across the country.

FCAA RESOURCE CENTER

We are pleased to make available the Better Together Resource Guide. This booklet provides a brief history of the alumni movement, information about the benefits of building partnerships between alumni and our allies toward shared goals, ideas for making a difference in your own community, and tips and strategies to help you become more effective in your efforts to Connect Today...Transform Tomorrow. You can download the booklet from our website or call our office to request hard copies.



"This was the most influential event in my adult life."

About this resource guide

An overview of all of the content in this booklet, including what you will find in each section. This booklet is intended for alumni, staff, and community members who are interested in learning more about the history and mission of Foster Care Alumni of America. It is a resource for anyone who is interested in learning more about the history and mission of Foster Care Alumni of America. It is a resource for anyone who is interested in learning more about the history and mission of Foster Care Alumni of America.

Table of Contents

- 1 One Vision, A Team: Creating Our Legacy and Growing a Great Movement
- 2 Foster Care Alumni of America: A Great Tradition
- 3 History in Action
- 4 Making a Difference in Your Community
- 5 Building and Growing Shared Success
- 6 Partnering for Success
- 7 Through Sharing, We'll Get There
- 8 Personal and Community Life
- 9 Table of Contents
- 10
- 11
- 12

COMMUNITY

13 How to build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members. This section provides a checklist of questions to help you build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members.

COMMUNITY

14 How to build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members. This section provides a checklist of questions to help you build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members.

COMMUNITY

15 How to build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members. This section provides a checklist of questions to help you build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members.

community

13 How to build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members. This section provides a checklist of questions to help you build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members.

COMMUNITY

14 How to build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members. This section provides a checklist of questions to help you build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members.

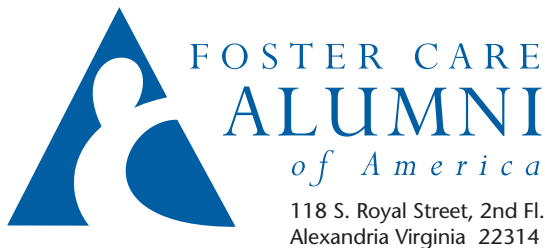
COMMUNITY

15 How to build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members. This section provides a checklist of questions to help you build a strong partnership with your agency and other community members.

I learned I have a great big family.

I was able to share experiences with people that cared.

Foster Care Alumni of America was made possible by multi-year grants from Casey Family Programs. Casey Family Programs is proud to be the Founding Sponsor of Foster Care Alumni of America.



www.FosterCareAlumni.org
1-888-ALUMNI-0

The mission of Foster Care Alumni of America is to connect the alumni community and to transform policy and practice, ensuring opportunity for people in and from foster care.