



Connecting Today... Transforming Tomorrow

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VOICES OF EXPERIENCE

Foster Care Alumni of America brings together the community of adults who lived in foster care as children or youth. We estimate there are **12 MILLION** of us in the United States. As alumni of foster care, we have an expertise about the system that can only be gained the hard way. We know the changes that need to happen in foster care policy and practice. We know what makes foster care the best it can be. We want to work with you to ensure that foster children—the children who belong to all of us—have the same opportunities and supports as other young people in America.

Consider who else we represent...who else's photos and stories should be part of your planning and decision making. Negative adult outcomes for people who have been in foster care are not what any of us want for the children for whom we—as citizens—have taken parental responsibility.

- **1 in 4 of us experience homelessness** within one year of leaving foster care. In addition, 30% of people who are homeless report having been in foster care as young people.
- **Rates of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder are twice as high** for alumni as they are for war veterans.
- **30% of us are without health insurance** after leaving care, even though we are more likely than the general population to have health and mental health concerns.
- **Only 2-5% of alumni complete college** with a BA or higher, leading to lower rates of suitable employment and higher rates of public assistance.

How am I expected to survive in this world without a family?
John, age 27, Pennsylvania

When I first "got out" of foster care I wanted nothing more to do with it...ever. If I never saw a social worker again it would be too soon. However, as I began to transition through college and into the world of work, I realized how silenced the voices of foster care youth are. I also realized that I had a very unique perspective as someone who is an alumna of foster care, as someone who was able to overcome extreme obstacles to be successful in life. Children in foster care are often left with no resources, no protection and no advocates.
Melissa Smith, age 26, Maryland



As a foster care alumnus, I have always wished that my experience would have been more positive than it was. I want to be involved with the issues and strategies that are being implemented to make a more positive and lasting change.
Xanthe Enos, age 25, Oregon



Funny how one feels when they believe that they are the only person who has felt the pain, the suffering, and the stigmas associated with having been burned by the hot iron brand of foster care. I felt isolated and trapped, all alone and with no one that could really relate to what I was feeling.

I am working now to make connections and to find what had been missing: understanding. I am taking this understanding to change our system in a way that would make future generations of foster youth know that they always have a say in their own lives, and a community to belong to. Alumni are banding together to unite our voices into one and will never be ignored or forgotten again.
Aaron Weaver, age 23, Nebraska

When I was a foster child I didn't even know I had rights. This needs to change.
Terrance D. Garr, age 44, Ohio



I joined FCAA to lend support to this much needed organization, to connect with others in and from foster care and to support the transformation of this culture of abandonment and isolation to one of encouragement and the ability to overcome all issues and odds.
Julie Palmer-Blackwell, age 60, Illinois

I was a foster child from 1930 to 1943. Lots of memories--good and bad. I aged out of the system totally unprepared for what I needed. I've learned that today, the problems in the system are much the same. I'd like to revamp the entire system, and I have the life experience to help make that happen.
Betty Lawrence, age 83, New Jersey



Overcoming the challenges to independence has been a very difficult journey for me and I could not have done it alone. I want to be a part of helping other foster youth.
Dawn Hamilton, age 25, California