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

AUSTIN, TX —Young people and adults gathered today in Austin 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 were in Texas’ foster care system.

“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,” 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.”

In Texas today, there are over 30,000 children in foster care. They will spend an average of more than 18 months in foster care and 43% will experience three or more placements. In 2006, 1,399 young people “aged out” of foster care in Texas without a family to rely on or a home to return to.

Today’s event, held at the Lifeworks Youth Resource Center, 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 in states across the nation, including: California, Arizona, Washington, Maryland, Pennsylvania and Virginia.

“This reunion represents all of my brothers and sisters from foster care coming together to claim this tradition as our own,” said Ryan Dollinger of Austin, who spent six years in foster care and attended today’s event. “As a community of alumni, we are uniting to stand up for change to make sure that the next generations of youth in foster care won’t grow up feeling alone or forgotten.”

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 Congressional 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.

“I am so proud to be a part of this first-annual Foster Care Alumni of America event,” said Senator Mary Landrieu of Louisiana, one of the honorary host committee members for today’s event. “I know that FCAA will continue to promote awareness of our foster care system and the ways it can be strengthened, and I am proud to be a member of the extended family of our foster care alumni.”

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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