

FOR RELEASE ON SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 20, 2008

CONTACT: Misty Stenslie, 703-862-7295 (p), mstenslie@fostercarealumni.org

**D.C. METRO AREA FOSTER CARE ALUMNI HOLD FIRST-EVER
“FAMILY REUNION”**

*Attendees Highlight Needs of Washington and Virginia’s Foster Children and Youth,
and Look to Congress to Act to Improve Nation’s Foster Care System*

Arlington, VA — Young people and adults gathered today in Arlington 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 foster care.

“All too often, youth in Washington, D.C., Virginia 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 Virginia today, there are more than 7,800 children in foster care. They will spend an average of more than two years in foster care and forty percent will experience three or more moves while in care. In 2006, 979 young people “aged out” of foster care in Virginia without a family to rely on or a home to return to. In Washington, D.C., there are currently 2,360 children and youth in foster care. They spend an average of nearly four years in foster care (compared to the national average of two years). In 2006, 166 youth “aged out” of foster care in Washington, D.C.

Today’s event at Glencarlyn Park in Arlington 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, other Foster Care Alumni Family Reunions took place today in states across the nation, including: Maryland, Pennsylvania, Arizona, Washington, California and Texas.

“Our society is built around families, and when you grow up without one, it is easy to feel isolated and different,” said Misty Stenslie, Deputy Director of the Foster Care Alumni of America, who attended today’s event in Arlington. “The need for a family doesn’t disappear when you hit adulthood – everyone needs someone to mourn or celebrate with, a place to go for the holidays, a feeling of belonging no matter what happens.”

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.

“Tradition begins with a first step, and I am confident that the first Alumni Family Reunion is destined to become an important annual event in the lives of Americans who have been in foster care,” said Congressman Jim McDermott (D-WA), one of the authors of the new child welfare legislation, and an honorary host committee member for today’s event. “As Chairman of the House subcommittee that has jurisdiction over foster care, I want your help to make foster care better, so that one story we can share in the second annual reunion is about how we worked together to make a positive difference in the lives of young Americans.”

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) and Senator Mary Landrieu (D-LA).

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.

###