



“How Are The Children?”

Presentation

Prepared for:
National CASA Association

Presented by:



T R D F R A M E W O R K S

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Objectives

National CASA enlisted TRD Frameworks to conduct a “national focus group” – a series of discussion groups across the U.S. composed of foster care youths – to elicit their personal insights into a number of areas relating to their experiences in foster care.

These young people shared their thoughts and feelings about their foster care experiences, the effect of the system on their motivation and self-esteem, how they manage their schooling, the aging-out process, the impact of an adult presence in their lives, and other topics.



Methodology

- ◆ **Technique:** Focus Group Interviews
- ◆ **Number of Groups:** 5
- ◆ **Moderator:** Debora Scott, TRD Frameworks
- ◆ **Recruiting:**

The CASA office in each city invited current or former foster care youths (ages 14 or older) who they believed would be willing to participate, and who are able to communicate their experiences.

Some of the youths have participated in Speakers Bureaus or other venues (New Haven, San Diego and Anchorage).

Participants were served food and beverages during the sessions to provide a relaxed atmosphere, and received a small cash stipend for their participation. However, most did not realize they would be receiving the stipend until the group was over.

The youths indicated they were eager to participate because of the opportunity to contribute to the understanding of foster youth today.

Methodology *(continued)*

- ◆ **Locations / Dates :** New Haven CT (2/5/08), Miami FL (2/7/08), Anchorage AK (2/16/08), Dallas TX (2/19/08) & San Diego CA (2/20/08)
- ◆ **Duration of Groups:** Approximately 2 hours each
- ◆ **Recording:** Digital audio

Participant Profile

Most of these foster care youths (72%) are older teenagers – in the 15-to-19 age bracket.

◆ **Average Participant Age**

- **New Haven: 16 years old**
- **Miami: 17 years old**
- **Anchorage: 18 years old**
- **Dallas: 21 years old**
- **San Diego: 16 years old**

◆ **Nearly 2/3 (64%) are female.**

◆ **The majority (58%) are currently in high school.**

◆ **54% are currently in foster care.**

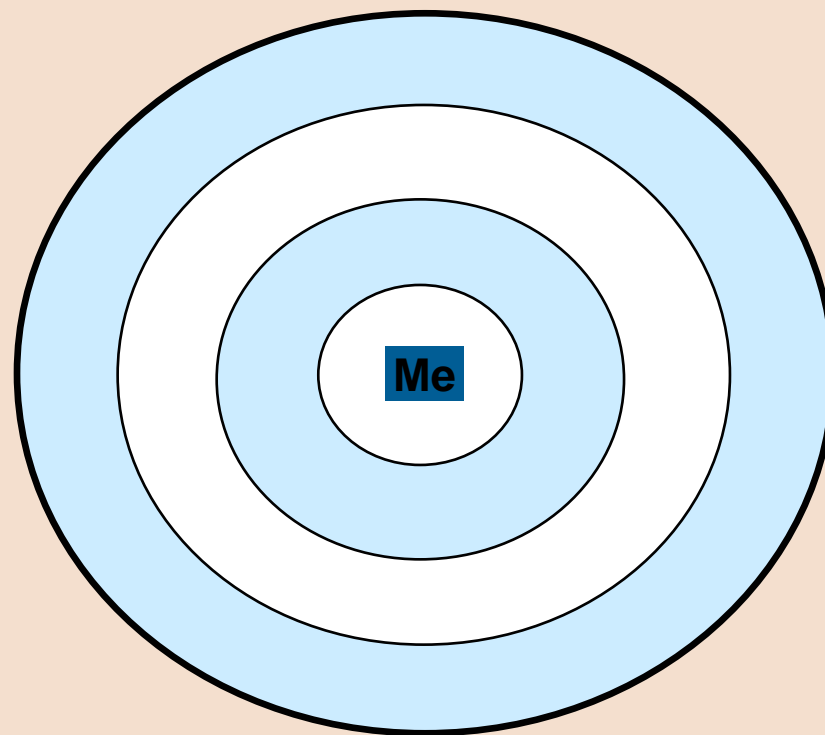
◆ **50% had either a CASA or a GAL volunteer.**

◆ **The vast majority of youths participating in the focus groups are ethnic minorities: specifically African American, Hispanic/Latino and Native Alaskan (Anchorage).**



Connection

Participants completed a Connection Circles written exercise(example below) that asked them to place the people in their lives in various circles, depending on how close the relationship is. Youths place those who are closest to them within the innermost circle. The next circle would contain those they are a little less close to, and so on.



These young people feel most strongly connected to their biological siblings and parents, then to other relatives (especially grandmothers). Many youths also report feeling closely connected to their CASA/GAL volunteer.

- ◆ The following results should be used as an indication only*. Connections with scores smaller than 7% are not reported.

People They Feel Most Strongly Connected To

(Base = Participants in Miami/Dallas/San Diego; who completed exercise; and identified names; n=27)

<u>INNER CIRCLE</u>	
Biological Siblings	48%
Biological Parents	33
Grandparent/s	30
Boyfriend / Girlfriend	30
CASA / GAL	26
Foster Parent / Adopted Parent	26
Friends	22
Foster Siblings	14
Cousin / Uncle / Aunt / Other Relatives	11
Case Worker	7
Teacher	7

*Because there were incomplete exercises and many unidentified names. Should be read as follows: 48% of the participants put 1 or more of their Biological Siblings in their Inner Circle.

Criteria they use to put people in their inner circle include: real, consistent caring and a willingness to listen.

◆ **Main criteria for inclusion in inner circle:**

- They care for you / “Won’t hurt you” / Trust / Openness / Honesty / “Good vibes”
- You can relate to them / talk to them / They will listen to you
- They’re “always there for you” / Provide help when needed
- Mutual respect / They “believe in me”

“(The people in my inner circle) won’t hurt you in any way.” (New Haven)

“When you call them and say, ‘I’m not doing very well, can I have a moment of your time?’ And they sit there and they actually say, ‘Yes.’ For me, that’s what puts them into that circle.” (Miami)

“It’s people who help me overcome obstacles. There’s nothing any of them can do as much as having someone to talk to – it really helps me out.” (San Diego Female)

◆ **Youths rate biological parents within their inner circle, while at the same time admitting they cannot live with them.**

“I talk to my mom all the time. I don’t want to move back in with her or anything, but we do have a relationship.” (Anchorage Female)

“Basically everything got out of control. The reason I went into foster care was for protection.” (Miami Female)

Self-Perception

All of these youths say their lives have been much harder for them, compared to other kids their age, but most say these experiences have only strengthened them.

- ◆ **They feel like they are “more real” than other people and wouldn’t trade their backgrounds for a normal upbringing**
 - **Because it made them who they are today:**
 - Strong, independent and self-reliant
- ◆ **Main ways they describe themselves:**
 - Strong
 - Independent / Self-made / Self-motivated
 - Survivors
 - Positive / Proud of themselves
 - More understanding / Aware / See things differently / more clearly

“Some of these kids, they disrespect their Moms! It’s like, ‘F. you, Mom’ and they call their Moms names. I almost say – ‘I would love to have my Mom do that for me. I don’t know my Mom.” (New Haven)

“I feel lucky. I’m able to understand people more. Yes, I’ve been through a lot of hell and hot water, but because of that I’m a new person.” (New Haven Male)

“I feel strong. Because it’s like everybody that’s been through that – I’m still standing.” (New Haven Female)

“I guess there’s a sense of survival and saying that you’ve made it. I think everybody here is independent. If everybody got taken out of their homes right now and were left on a street corner – they would still be able to survive. And survive good.” (Anchorage Male)



Several say they are driven by not wanting to repeat the “cycle” – reliving their parents’ mistakes.

- ◆ **They want to use their own misfortunes to get stronger.**

“My mother had me when she was 16. And my goal was to turn 18 and not have a baby. And so far, I’ve accomplished it. I’m not going to have a child, I think that I’m going through a positive path.” (Miami Female)

“I think it can go both ways. Sometimes kids don’t turn out good, and they just repeat the cycle. And there’s other kids that can become strong and dominant.” (San Diego Female)

“And I look at my parents, and they are something that I don’t want to turn into, or be like. I don’t want to be unstable, moving from placement to placement. But I’ve still got issues. But being in the system, I wouldn’t change anything about it, because it made me the person that I am today.” (San Diego Female)



On the negative side, some of these youths feel wounded emotionally.

- ◆ They are stressed out, and have issues with anger and trusting people.
- ◆ Many also feel stigmatized or “labeled.” They say people think they “must have done something wrong,” or they wouldn’t be in foster care.

“There is something in my past with my adopted family that I have not been able to get over yet. Because there’s stuff I want to grow (past) and forget and stuff like that. I survived certain situations that happened – physically – but emotionally it still hurts.” (New Haven Female)

“The wounds heal but only so much. But you have to use it to help yourself out – because of what you’ve been through.” (New Haven Male)

“A lot of people these days...put us all into one cluster. ‘Okay, you’re foster child, you did something bad.’ And all the time, that’s not the case. I don’t think I’ve seen a situation – and I’ve been in the foster care system for 16 years – where it was the foster child’s fault. That’s just not what happens. It’s either the parent, or the guardian, or whoever.... (Foster kids are) labeled as ‘delinquents.’” (San Diego Male)



When asked to name their heroes, many point to themselves – or to the adults who helped them out.

- ◆ Some have a tough time naming any heroes, in the traditional sense.
- ◆ Other heroes mentioned most often:
 - Jesus / God
 - Mary J. Blige
 - Barack Obama

“I don’t have anybody that I look up to but myself.” (New Haven Male)

“I feel like I’m my own hero. Because sometimes when I feel like I fall, there’s no one to catch me.” (San Diego Female)

“You have to be your own hero, because what if no one’s there?” (San Diego Female)

“Some people think they’re too cool to have heroes.” (San Diego Male)

“My godmother (is my hero). She got me and my sister (out of our) foster homes.” (New Haven)



Foster Care Experience

Many youths find positive foster care situations that genuinely meet their needs.

- ◆ The main common denominator of these positive situations is a healthy relationship with their foster parent.
- ◆ Main aspects of positive foster homes:
 - “You just know” when it’s right / The family is “really there for me” / “They want you for who you are” / Accepting attitude by foster parent(s) / They’re not in it for the money
 - More privacy / Own living space
 - More stable / Less drama than biological family
 - Get along with foster siblings
 - Paired with biological sibling in home
 - Adopted by foster family

“I have a really good situation. I was in foster homes since I was a year or 6 months old and ever since.... (But now) I think it’s just the right family.” (Miami Male)

“(Great foster parents are) the ones that listen. And they truly care for you. They’ll discipline you when you need it and they’ll push you in the right direction.” (Anchorage Female)

““(My foster home) is really, really positive. There’s not words to explain my new foster Mom. My new foster home is so (accepting) – she is so awesome.” (Anchorage Male)

Even when they land in a positive foster care situation, these young people described the emotional pressure of living in foster care.

- ◆ **It's painful to be taken away from biological parents.**
- ◆ **And they hate being separated from their siblings.**
- ◆ **Some fear abandonment if they are perceived to be a problem in the foster home.**

"I feel so low when my foster Mom is mad at me." (Anchorage Male)

"It's like all these years go by (in foster care), and you wish that time was with your real parents. They don't know how badly that hurts.... It's a very painful thing in somebody's life, to go through that." (New Haven Female)

"I have a question. When there is a group of kids (siblings) – they're a family. Why do they separate them? What is the purpose of that?... I think the system should work that out, because it tears away people." (New Haven)



Most have also experienced difficult family and foster care situations. Many share the negative perception that foster parents are “in it for the money”.

- ◆ **Main complaints they have about their (current or former) foster care situations are (in order of mentions):**
 - Favoritism / Treated differently from “real” children / Especially for purchases
 - Foster parents are “in it for the money”
 - They feel inhuman / Treated like a servant or a “slave” / “You’re a prop”
 - Stressful / Foster mother is mean / Foster parents get on your nerves
 - Doesn’t feel like a real family / Feels temporary
 - Conflicts with foster siblings
 - Cultural / religious conflicts
 - Have to keep changing schools
 - “Problems” arise and they have to leave

“I think everyone has their own experiences. I was in foster care and I was being very negative. I was in 5 of them. The bad ones were the ones that kind of paraded you around. You’re not a human, you’re a prop.” (New Haven Male)

“I think they were in it for the money. (I felt that because of) the way I was treated.” (New Haven Female)

“We have favoritism in our house. They have 2 biological daughters and they get what they want.” (San Diego Male)

One of the most challenging aspects of these youths' lives is their lack of stability – due to the constant changes in their living situations.

- ◆ Many can't remember how many homes they've lived in.
- ◆ For those who can recall, the numbers range from 1 to 25 foster homes:
 - With an average of 10 homes lived in.

"I'm not sure how many families (I've lived with), but I've been at like 23 different places. That includes like families and shelters and juvenile centers. (I was 12 when I first entered the system.) Now I'm 17. I guess (23 seems like a lot), but you get used to it. So I'm just like an adaptor." (Anchorage Female)

"I've been living in (this) foster home, for almost a year. (I've lived in) so many I can't really remember.... I was 13 when I went into foster care. I would change houses because they couldn't accept the way I was." (Anchorage Male)

"I remember one experience where I was with a social worker and she was trying to find me another home at like 3 o'clock in the morning. And she literally had a sheet and what it said on the sheet was: the person's name, their age, their address, and then what kind of kid they'll accept. And it was very specific – it will say like, 'White female only, age 12 to 13.'" (New Haven)



School



These foster care youths face several challenges in their schooling.

- ◆ **Many feel neglected compared to fellow students:**
 - **Because they have no parents to: make them lunch, meet with teachers and pick them up after school.**
- ◆ **Other students also tease them about their lack of “things,” wearing old clothes, and so on.**

“In Middle School they are always sitting at a table together and saying, ‘Oh, my Mom packed my lunch’ or something like that. And I used to feel bad because I couldn’t ever say anything. In high school – I’m used to the game now. I’m older, more mature.” (New Haven Female)

“Yesterday this girl came to school with a torn shoe, and (this other girl) was like laughing at her, and I said, ‘That’s not funny. What if you came to school with a hole in your shoe?’” (New Haven)

“It’s kind of like – ‘Don’t have pity for me, but support me.’ I don’t want you to treat me better than other kids, but treat me like any other kid that’s in the classroom – because that’s who I am. We’re all unique.” (San Diego Female)



Their constant moving around makes it difficult to keep up with schoolwork.

“When I was in treatment and foster care, I was moving around so much that I lost a lot of credits, I wasn’t getting all of my transcripts. I should have graduated, but I lost so many credits that I ended up having to get my GED.” (Anchorage Female)

“With different placements, we get transferred to different schools.... Kids run away or just don’t go to school.” (San Diego Female)

- ◆ However, some see what the future holds and have worked hard to turn their academics around.

“My junior year was positive, but before that it was negative. I failed every class except my electives. I would never do the work. But junior year before I turned 18, I was like, ‘I can’t mess around anymore.’ When I turn 18, I want to get out of custody. And I kind of made myself bust my ass and work.” (Anchorage Female)



Obstacles

The biggest obstacle these young people face is their own self-imposed pressure to succeed and to avoid “repeating the cycle.”

- ◆ And they’re worried they won’t get enough support to accomplish these goals.
- ◆ They feel pressure to:
 - Graduate from high school or get a GED
 - “Get stable”
 - Adjust to new living situations
 - Handle college
 - See their way to “success”
 - Avoid “failure” – which means (in their minds) repeating the cycle

“I think about the future a lot, what’s going to happen down the road. It’s a question mark. I don’t really look into my past because it hurts. So I try to take it day by day.” (New Haven)

“(My main problem) is just the constant fear of failure. Because my parents failed and my parents’ parents failed, it’s constantly just like – there are so many dreams that I have, and so many hopes, and there is so much that I want to do with my life. Then again, I have to get there first. And in the back of my head it’s like – ‘Well, what if you fail?’ That’s the way a lot of foster kids think – if they just stay as a failure, then they don’t have to worry about failing.” (San Diego Female)

“I think it’s weird that we have so much pressure, and we have so much potential to be like the best people out there – because we get the best of both worlds. We’re street-smart, and we have the potential to be book-smart.... But most foster youth drop out and don’t go to college, or they start college and don’t finish it.” (Anchorage Female)



When asked specifically about race, youths in Dallas and San Diego say race is a fact of life that they have to work through, but it won't keep them from succeeding.

- ◆ **While the majority of youths are either African-American or Latino, the subject of race does not come up unprompted.**
- ◆ **When prompted, most put race lower down the list of the many other obstacles they face as foster youths.**
 - **Most of the Dallas group acknowledge that racial prejudice has been an obstacle, especially for employment.**

“Everybody in Texas knows that if you’re African American, you have (two strikes against you) if you apply for some jobs.” (Dallas Male)

“I think when it comes to foster kids, race doesn’t matter. Everyone has a problem, everybody has some situations.” (San Diego Female)

“I think kids our age are more open (to race) today. Different from older people.” (Dallas Female)

“(For foster kids) race isn’t an issue. We have diversity in our group homes, many of us are biracial. We live in a rainbow world.” (San Diego Female)



Aging Out

These youths are extremely eager to “break out” of the system as soon as they can.

- ◆ This attitude is typical of many teenagers their age, but probably magnified because they have lived under tight restrictions and rules all their lives.
 - Independence is achieved all at once, not gradually as it is for most teens.

“When you’re in state custody, the only thing you can think of is getting out – regardless of whether you love your foster family or not.” (Anchorage Female)

“While I was in care, I was so focused on wanting to be out, that I wasn’t thinking about what I wanted to do when I got out.” (Anchorage Female)

“You just gotta have that freedom!” (Dallas Male)



When youths do age out of the system, their biggest problem is finding resources available to them.

- ◆ A few say it's like stepping off a cliff into a black hole.
- ◆ They receive some funding, but many say it's not enough to pay rent – especially in a big city.
- ◆ After a few years, their assistance ends (usually by age 21).
 - Which means the end of housing subsidies, health care and scholarship/education dollars.
- ◆ Many find themselves unprepared to deal with their new freedom and uncertain futures.

“They give you some money toward an apartment, but it’s not enough.” (Miami Female)

“When you turn 18 you’re not ready. They don’t give you any time to find something comfortable.” (Miami Male)

“Foster care has helped me out a lot for my future, but I wasn’t ready to be just dropped off. So right now, I’m kind of stuck. What am I going to do? Am I going to go to college?” (Anchorage Female)



There are varying levels of knowledge regarding resources available to them, and how to access them.

- ◆ In each city, panelists with knowledge about resources and how to navigate the system shared their insights with the group.
- ◆ Some believe adults in the system purposely withhold information about resources.

“I think foster kids kind of have an advantage, because there is a lot of money out there that will pay for college, help pay for some of those things. And I think some people don’t take advantage of that, because they don’t know.” (San Diego Female)

“I think sometimes the kids want and desire it, but they just don’t know how to go about it without the support system. Like if my CASA volunteer wasn’t here, I wouldn’t be doing it. All of this paperwork was just overwhelming – and without somebody to help you, I wouldn’t do it.” (San Diego Female)

“(My old caseworker) is the type that – if she never had it, why should we? She’s the type that knows we have benefits, but why use them? She’d rather we pull ourselves up by our bootstraps like she did. It’s like she doesn’t want you to succeed.” (Dallas Male)



Support Structures

A few of these youths have been fortunate enough to find one adult – a CASA volunteer, caseworker, foster parent or mentor– who helped them out immeasurably.

“I had a caseworker named Karen, and it wasn’t really about consistency, it was about her believing in me – when no one else would believe in me. Because I was a problem child, but I was a problem child for a reason. Nobody was listening to me, so I felt like, ‘Well, I need to do this so you will listen to me.’ And she saw that I wasn’t just acting out because I was a problem child, I was acting out because I needed someone to listen to me. And once she listened to me and figured out what was going on with me, she started working on my behalf.” (Dallas Female)

“She (CPS worker) was the only person there on my graduation day. No matter what I did, no matter what I’d done, she was always there for me.” (Dallas Female)

“My CASA volunteer wants to participate in everything... like my grades – she always says, ‘You’d better keep them up!’” (San Diego Male)

“My CASA volunteer, Kevin, got me into a lot of things I do now, like my guitar, acting camp and all that. He kind of motivated me to get up and do things like that. I see him every week.” (Dallas Male)



CASA Volunteers

Many who have a CASA volunteer say they go far beyond their role as courtroom advocates.

- ◆ They get very involved in these youths' lives:
 - *“(My CASA volunteer) is the first person I call.”*

- ◆ They are often the one constant adult in these youths' lives

“(My CASA volunteer) Jeannine has been with me since I was 14 or 15. And before Jeannine, I lived in a lot of places throughout my foster care. I was in foster care from the age of 3 to 18. I always bounced around a lot. And I started like feeling really worthless – ‘Gosh, what is my purpose, why am I here? And nobody wants me.’ And Jeanine came into my life, and when she did, she started putting self-worth into me and making me realize that, ‘Hey, I am somebody.’” (Dallas Female)

“She (my CASA) has been the most consistent one in my life – the other people just come and go, but she is just there. If I need something or someone to depend on, it’s going to be Ruth. I can call anybody I want to, but in the end it’s going to be her.” (Dallas Male)

“Ron is my CASA volunteer and he has been there since I was 11 or 12.... He helped me go through the time when I had my son, and I didn’t think I was ready for it. He comes to every one of my games since I was a sophomore and playing on the varsity. Every award that I’ve had. He’s come to more than half of my college games.” (Dallas Male)

“I wouldn’t have been able to age out of the system unless I had my CASA volunteer. It’s a big step for a kid.” (San Diego Female)



CASA volunteers provide badly needed emotional support, a steady source of advice, and they fill a huge void in these children's lives.

“When I got out of the system, (my CASA volunteer) wouldn't let me go astray. I'm headstrong and she keeps me on track when I want to do things my way. She has the patience. She's been with me since I was 13, and she's watched me go through a lot.... She's been the most consistent one in my life – the other people just come and go, but she is just there. If I need something or someone to depend on, it's going to be Ruth. I can call anybody I want to, but in the end it's going to be her.” (Dallas Male)

“(My CASA volunteer) often makes me smile. She wants to know everything about me.” (San Diego Female)

“Whenever I'm in trouble – she's there. She's the first person I call.” (San Diego Female)



The Future

Most of these foster care youths are eager to get out of the system, and see a bright future for themselves.

- ◆ **Many want to bring their experiences to bear in Foster Care or Social Work and “help people out.”**
 - **Several would also like to be foster parents.**

“(In 5 years) I’ll be out of school. I want to maintain contact with Foster Care, so I want to work as a therapist for children. Help children. Because I’ve gone through a lot of problems, I think I can help them.” (Miami Female)

“After I’ve been through what I’ve been through, I want to help people who are hurting. That’s the purpose of my life. And I also want my girls to see their Mom is strong.” (Dallas Female)

“In five years, I want to open up a day care. But I don’t want any babies. I just want it to be me in the day care. They go home at night. Just me and the kids in the day care.” (Miami Female)

“I’m a rebellious person – I refuse to follow the herd. If I’m going to succeed, I’m going to do it with my own ambitions and my own ideas. (In 5 years) I’m pretty much going to be the next Da Vinci. I’m going to innovate something.” (Dallas Male)

“I probably won’t do everything, but I’ll do the big things.” (San Diego Female)



But, some have more realistic dreams than others.

- ◆ There are concerns that they may not be able to accomplish what they hope to.
- ◆ Some point to possible distractions such as their chaotic, or troubled biological families, others to a concern that they may give up if life proves to be too difficult.

“Honestly, I just want to be average. Because I’ve been lower and at the bottom my whole life.... (By average I mean) not struggling for money. Having a constant job. Maybe some kids. A nice house. I just want to be satisfied with life.... But it’s in question, because I don’t know anything else besides struggling. So it’s kind of hard to see anything else.” (Dallas Male)

“Nothing will stop me, but I see some obstacles. I love my family to death, but that’s not really the best thing, because I could be doing something else but get distracted because my brother gets evicted and comes to live with me.” (Anchorage Female)

“I think a lot of foster kids do have that hope, but they kind of lose it. They want to do well when they get out, but they’re not sure if they can.” (San Diego Female)



The participants leave us with the following advice . . .

“Foster kids should be seen and heard.” (New Haven Female)

“Don’t classify, don’t underestimate, don’t judge us.” (Anchorage Female)

“Don’t judge us just because of what our file says. Get to know us. Listen to us, don’t just hear us. And if you’re a foster family, try to put us into your family – try to invite us in more.” (Anchorage Male)



Finally, a young poet offers us this . . .

“I’m a writer, I write poetry. This is just to everybody – something I just jotted down:

So many people talk about family,

But the dramas set in when you have none.

You take breath after breath, thinking life is done,

But still, you have nowhere to run.

You feel like you’re under the gun.

But you believe in yourself, realizing you have won.

Open your eyes to a new future, then look at the horizon for the sun.

And remember, and realize, a new future has begun.” (Dallas Male)



Conclusions

Conclusions

- ◆ **These are brave, tough youths who had to overcome many more problems than other children growing up. Most of them never had a real childhood.**
 - **“Some of these kids, they disrespect their moms! It’s like ‘F. you, mom’, and they call their mom’s names. I almost tell them – ‘I would love to have my mom do that for me. I don’t know my mom!’”**
- ◆ **Many youths feel stigmatized or “labeled”.**
 - **“We (must have done) something that didn’t satisfy our parents. That’s how I get it. ‘You had to do something wrong.’ And actually, I wish I had – but I didn’t.” (San Diego Female)**
- ◆ **But these foster care youths don’t want to be victims. They simply want and need support and people who they can trust and depend on.**
 - ***“I don’t want anybody throwing a pity party for me – like, ‘Oh, poor child.’ Don’t give me that.” (Anchorage Female)***
 - ***“Don’t have pity for me, but support me.” (San Diego Female)***



Conclusions

- ◆ **When the foster care system is at its worst, the dominant condition for these youths is instability. Also, they have no psychological stability – no one to lean on, a sense no one cares. This perception hurts their self-esteem:**
 - **“I got out of there, went to another foster home. And they made me feel like – I’m still living outside, in outer space.” (Anchorage Male)**
 - **“I’ve been living in a foster home, for almost a year. (I’ve lived in) so many I can’t really remember.... I was 13 when I went into foster care.” (San Diego Female)**

Conclusions *(continued)*

- ◆ **These young people try very hard to turn their negative experiences into something positive.**
- ◆ **They are desperate to avoid repeating the “cycle” – reliving their parents’ mistakes.**
- ◆ **Many have become resolute, determined and optimistic young people.**
- ◆ **Many feel like they’re living on a knife’s edge – where they can either succeed or fail.**
 - **“I think it can go both ways. Sometimes kids don’t turn out good, and they just repeat the cycle. And there’s other kids that can become strong and dominant.” (San Diego Female)**
- ◆ **When the system is at its best – and this has to involve a caring adult in their lives – they can come out of it “stronger.”**
- ◆ **Here the support of a CASA volunteer or another significant adult is vital – to push them in a positive direction:**
 - **“What I like is they (GAL volunteers) can give you emotional support. Like, ‘You’re going to make it through this’ They help you to stay positive, instead of negative.” (Miami Female)**



Conclusions *(continued)*

Aging Out

- ◆ One major problem that needs to be addressed is the transition period, how to help them age out of the system more successfully.
- ◆ These foster care youths have grown up in a restrictive world, with constantly-changing rules, and many lack real-world skills:
 - *“I spent 10 years of my life being in hell, with nothing but rules, rules, rules, rules, rules. You want me to survive in the real world, but you won’t even let me fall on my face.” (Dallas Female)*
- ◆ They want to get out so badly that they burst out of the system, and often find themselves unprepared:
 - *“(My future) is going to be crazy! Oh, I just think about it. I can’t wait for the future – I’ll just jump right in. It’s so much to do, and so much life to live.” (San Diego Female)*
 - *“I want to go bungee-jumping.” (San Diego Female)*
 - *“While I was in care, I was so focused on wanting to be out, that I wasn’t thinking about what I wanted to do when I got out.” (Anchorage Female)*



Conclusions *(continued)*

- ◆ They zoom out of the system, and then 2 years later realize that they have missed out on resources (like scholarships) that were available to them.
- ◆ They need a better way to transition out, more of a buffer, perhaps a transitional time where they can choose to opt back in to housing and resources. Ways for them to be guided more gradually into independence.
 - *“(The big problem is) cutting off the aid. Because basically you’ve been sheltered all your life, since you’re 18. Once you’re free, people want to go out and roam and do stuff. And then once you’ve got your head together, you’ve basically messed up your benefits.” (Dallas Female)*

Conclusions *(continued)*

CASA Volunteers

- ◆ **These youths are hungry for someone to take an interest in them, and the CASA volunteers clearly fill that void in their lives. According to the kids, their CASA volunteers have really been there for them – in many cases for years.**
 - **“(My CASA volunteer) has been with me since I was 13, and she’s watched me go through a lot.... She’s been the most consistent one in my life – the other people just come and go, but she is just there.” Dallas Male**
 - **“(My CASA volunteer) often makes me smile. She wants to know everything about me.” San Diego Female**
 - **One participant said, however, that the waiting list for a CASA volunteer in San Diego is over 300 foster children, so she “will never get one.”**

- ◆ **In conclusion – These youths are amazingly determined to overcome any obstacles. But they have a tough road ahead, and they need help to reach their full potential. CASA and GAL volunteers become very involved in these youth’s lives, provide badly needed emotional support and are a steady source of advice. The effect has been nothing but positive.**

