

Project Everlast

FINDING SOLID GROUND FOR FOSTER YOUTH



A FOSTER CHILD'S SOUL

by Haley

Foster Care wears on child like a full-time job, family and credit card bills wear on an adult. Each day, it takes a piece of us that will take months, maybe years, to replace.

You may think that the rehabilitation of a foster child's soul only needs some super glue, a roll of duct tape, and a few Band-Aids to cover the scars, then wow, its good as new. But the only true solution is not to cover wounds, but to let the hands and hearts of a supportive relationship heal them.

A supportive relationship, especially after aging out, is when they carry us until we have recovered from a long journey through the system. They teach us, help us, give us the encouragement to keep moving forward and most importantly, forgive our mistakes without the price of handing us off to someone else.

Every youth needs that one person or one family to rehabilitate a foster child's soul. Each supportive relationship means something different to each youth.

If you only do one thing for each youth, I feel it should be to find that one supportive person for them. By doing this you can give a youth a whole new world, which is more than anyone could ask for.



Steps to Help Foster Youth Achieve Permanency

STEP 1

BE A SUPPORTIVE CARING ADULT

by Amy



Amy

Issue: Studies show youth are more successful if they have the support of a responsible, caring adult - especially after leaving the foster care system and moving out on their own. Unfortunately, many young people who leave the foster care system feel they have no one to turn to when they need help with important life matters. The need for permanence does not end at age 19.

Recommendation: People who work with young people in foster care should make every effort to insure that when they leave the state's care, they have the support of a permanent, caring adult. A supportive adult can be there to help us with things such as finding a job, obtaining a car or a place to live, applying to college or vocational schools, or offering important life advice.

"Even in adulthood, we need a supportive relationship with you."

STEP 2

TREAT ME AS AN INDIVIDUAL

by Janteice



Ashley, Oscar and Janteice

Issue: Many foster youth in care are treated as if they are exactly the same—like they have the same competencies, abilities, and had the same experiences. The term foster care often comes with the stigma of being, dumb, smelly, etc. Because of these labels, youth are rarely given the chance to prove otherwise.

Recommendations: Being a foster youth is hard enough to deal with without labels. Give youth the opportunity to show you who they really are. Just because they are a foster youth does not mean they are a problem child. A lot of youth are placed in care because of their parents or situations beyond their control. I was in care because my parents were alcoholic, drug addicted, abusers. This was no fault of mine and at times I was treated as if it was. Help by giving us the chance to grow and thrive as we should and to be treated fairly based upon our own individual actions and competencies.

"Treat others how you would like to be treated. Treat them as you would your own children."- Jessica

STEP 3

ACCEPT ME AS I AM

by Janteice

Issue: It is a recurring statement from many foster youth that foster parents do not really accept them for who they are. Foster youth sometimes feel as if they cannot be themselves around their foster family and the people around them in general. When showing their true personality they hear things like, "Why can't you be normal?", "My kids never did that.", and "Why are you so different?" This has proven to be detrimental to youth in many ways.

Recommendations: Foster youth aren't exactly like other children. We have our own personalities. We want to be able to act like ourselves when coming into a new situation and enjoy life as much as we can. We don't want to be, nor do we like being, compared to everyone else. People who work with us should encourage us to be our own person and forge our own paths. They should help us set and accomplish goals based on our personal likes and dislikes. If we are encouraged to do what makes us happy and what we are good at we are more likely to be successful and get along with others.

"Permanence means having a family that accepts you for who you are."



Jessica

STEP 4

BUILD A LIFELONG RELATIONSHIP

by Jessica

Issue: Many youth in care have experienced difficulties building lasting relationships due to the lack of feeling loved, being listened to and having a sense of belonging. Because of this, we don't always know how to establish relationships with a potential supportive person or maintain those that may already exist.

Recommendations: It is important for every youth to feel like they belong, are loved and are being heard. Show them you care by supporting them in their decisions. Encourage them to try new things and open up about problems they may be having. Be there for them not just when they need you most, but also when things are going great. Help them connect with people they call family (cousins, aunts, bio families, past foster families). We need them in our lives as well.

"Placements did not work because in my heart I felt alone, but in my mind I felt grown. The only problem in the home was me. I was almost eighteen and hated the world. I could not trust anyone. I didn't want to trust anyone. How could I trust someone? I had to protect myself from hurt. The only way I could do that was to guard my heart....I messed up three homes because of this." - Janteice



Cassey

STEP 5

SHOW US HOW

by Cassey

Issue: Many youth in the foster care system have not had someone to help them learn how to do things such as getting a driver's license, setting education goals, applying to a college, and obtaining employment.

Recommendations: It is important for everyone to learn how to do things to get around in the real world, especially foster children. Take the time to ask, "Do you know how to...?" From there, you can see how much the youth knows and simply explain the parts they are missing. This way we get the whole picture instead of a nutshell. And, it lets us know you care for us and our well being.

"Having a family is having someone who pushes you to do better through life!"

"My last foster parents were actually my bosses at work before becoming my foster parents. They felt I needed a driver's license and a car because I was already 18 and about to graduate from high school. They helped me get my license and even co-signed on car loan so I could get a set of wheels. I don't think I can ever thank them enough. Without them, I might still be walking." - Janteice

STEP 6

NEVER GIVE UP

by Haley

Issue: To many, foster parents are giving up on their foster youth. By doing this we, as the foster youth, begin to develop a sense of worthlessness and we begin to feel like we are unlovable because so many people do not keep faith in us. Foster youth need to feel loved and to have someone to stand by them, even if it's only one person. Besides, how quickly would you give up on your own children?

Recommendations: Forgive us—forgive our mistakes because after all, we are only human. Help us learn from our mistakes so we can help ourselves become successful. Prove us wrong—a lot of youth will test and push to see how far you will go for us. Chances are that someone else in our lives has abandoned us and given up on us and we begin to expect that everyone will lose faith in us. Stay strong and stand by our side through not only the sunny days but the rainy days too. Love us—we may not verbally express to you that we want love but who doesn't want to feel loved even if it's only one person? Give us unconditional love and teach us how to love in return.

"Love me when I least deserve it, because that's when I need it most."

HEROES

by Ricardo

A family is what I always wanted but
I never got the chance to have it.

I kept leaping through houses
like leaping through time.

I was in the past, then the future
and my life flashed before my eyes.

The times I went through were hard
and fun at the same time.

Those people who can grasp this
can truly be heroes.
Be the ground where we stand now.

Yeah, this is why God put me here.
To be the voice for those who need ground
to stand on and need help.

Make it better for those who are in it now.

PROJECT
EVERLAST

a program of Nebraska Children and Families Foundation

215 Centennial Mall South, Suite 200, Lincoln, Nebraska 68508

7101 Mercy Road, Suite 106, Omaha, Nebraska 68106

