

*The focus of this month's newsletter is listening to the voice and encouraging the autonomy of youth in care. The problems and outcomes of teens in care have long been the subject of research. Focusing on what foster youth say about helpful and non-helpful child welfare and juvenile justice practices as well as engaging youth in care and emancipated youth about how best to preparing them for independent living skill building only have been recently regarded as pertinent and valued. While there is not as much published research on this topic, the research that is available indicates that involving youth meaningfully—and successfully—in planning for their own treatment and care is quite possible. This research also indicates that involving youth meaningfully in planning provides benefits for the youth and his or her caregivers and providers*

### Sunshine Girl on a Rainy Afternoon

This is an excerpt from a foster teen's story.

"Sunshine Girl on a Rainy Day is a memoir about growing up as a female in the foster care system. The story arc follows many universal teenage experiences such as entering puberty, coping with cliques and venturing into the realms of physical intimacy. What is of particular importance about the Sunshine Girl's experiences is that they occurred within the context of a group foster home. Adolescence is typically a time of emotional upheaval. Coming of age, losing virginity and experiencing first love are experiences with which many can identify. However, the identity crises that all teens face are compounded by the stigma of being in institutional care. From the moment that Lisa entered foster care placement, she perceived crossing the threshold into a dark, new world. She writes, "I was no longer my father's child; I had taken on a new identity. I was a 'group home girl,' and group home girls were reportedly 'easy.'

Sunshine Girl on a Rainy Day is an account of abandonment and its aftermath. It documents the

challenges experienced in a series of temporary placements and how unprepared Lisa was to enter the adult world.



Like many teens that age out of foster care, Lisa entered the adult world without a safety net. After starting college at the age of sixteen, she was legally emancipated. Although legally an adult, she still had an adolescent mindset. Not surprisingly, she experimented with high-risk behavior, struggled with poverty and even experienced a period of homelessness.

Lisa Dickson's mother died when Lisa was ten years old. Her father remarried the following year. When his new wife asked Lisa's father to choose between the two of his wife or daughter, his choice was to abandon his child. From ages twelve to sixteen, Lisa grew up in a series of temporary placements, including an all-girls group home, a coed group home and an emergency shelter.

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Adolescence is typically a time of emotional upheaval. Coming of age, losing virginity and experiencing first love are experiences with which many can identify. However, the identity crises that all teens face are compounded by the stigma of being in institutional care. From the moment that Lisa entered foster care placement, she perceived crossing the threshold into a dark, new world. She writes, "I was no longer my father's child; I had taken on a new identity. I was a 'group home girl,' and group home girls were reportedly 'easy.' Sunshine Girl on a Rainy Day is an account of abandonment and its aftermath. It documents the challenges experienced in a series of temporary placements and how unprepared Lisa was to enter the adult world.

Like many teens that age out of foster care, Lisa entered the adult world without a safety net. After starting college at the age of sixteen, she was legally emancipated. Although legally an adult, she still had an adolescent mindset. Not surprisingly, she experimented with high-risk behavior, struggled with poverty and even experienced a period of homelessness.

Eventually, Lisa found a surrogate family in her peers at a college dorm. She received a graduate degree from the University of Kentucky in 1998, and became a wife and stepmother in 2000. Lisa finally established a family of her own, but according to Lisa, 'it took me almost thirty years to achieve it. ' "

Lisa Dickson lives and works in Central Ohio. She serves as a children's librarian for the Columbus Metropolitan Library and dedicates much of her time to assuring youth voice and choice for foster children and foster care alumni. As a former foster child, her passion is advocating for foster children, publicizing the challenges that they face and addressing their developmental and emotional needs through workshops, writing and public speaking. In 2007, Lisa co-founded the first state chapter of Foster Care Alumni of America. She co-advises the Ohio Chapter and serves as Communications Chair. Lisa Dickson has been repeatedly recognized by the Public Children Services Association of Ohio, Ohio Association of

Child-Caring Agencies and the Ohio Family Care Association for her efforts promoting the youth engagement and her advocacy efforts on behalf of teens in care. Lisa is a highly prolific and poignant author. To learn more about Lisa, her life and her efforts on behalf of teens in care, visit her numerous blogs including [Strength Renewal](#), [Save the Children Books](#), [Teen Reads Fostering Attachment](#), [Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio Youth Advisory Board](#), [Foster Care and the Role of the Church](#), [Closer Than Was Yesterday](#), [Foster Youth and Independent Living Skills](#), [Sunshine Girl On A Rainy Day](#), [Favorite Quotes](#), [Foster Care Alumni of America Ohio Chapter](#). These blogs can be accessed through [blogger.com/profile/11944993180509479994](http://blogger.com/profile/11944993180509479994).



The OHIO - Overcoming Hurdles in Ohio - Youth Advocacy Board (OYAB) is a statewide organization of youth ages 14 to 24 that have lived in a foster care setting. The organization has been operating since July 2006 with a mission to be the knowledgeable, statewide voice influencing policies that affect all youth who have experienced or will experience out-of-home care. Youth in foster care and their adult supporters are invited to attend quarterly OYAB meetings, which take place concurrently with meetings of the Ohio Independent Living Association.

OYAB meetings continue to grow in numbers and enthusiasm as awareness of the positive benefits of county-based youth advisory boards spreads across Ohio. These boards give current and former foster youth an opportunity to develop supportive and meaningful peer relationships, to learn first-hand the value of giving back to their communities, and to develop as leaders and productive adults.

Ohio now has 12 county youth advisory boards, in Allen, Athens, Cuyahoga, Fairfield, Franklin, Hamilton, Lorain, Lucas, Mahoning, Montgomery, Stark and Summit counties.

OYAB has focused on six areas of need: (1) Advocacy, (2) Court Proceedings, (3) Education, (4) Finance, (5) Housing and (6) Workforce. At the January 2012 OYAB meeting, members brainstormed action steps in each of these areas. These action steps were in turn transformed into a tactical plan of prioritized strategies. This plan was given along with the plan's priorities as a list of "Top Five Asks" To ODJFS Director Michael Colbert. The state department director agreed to these priorities. Results are being seen and include:

- A conference for youth in foster care
- Two new regional aftercare coordinators, to promote and support independent living and transitional services for youth in their designated regions
- A Transitional Youth Housing Task Force, to study the problem of housing for youth aging out of foster care
- ODJFS support for an OYAB website
- Continuing the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families Independent Living Allocation

There is much to be learned from Ohio's current and former foster youth, and readers should seek ways to include them in the work of child welfare and juvenile justice. These young adults come prepared, researched and ready to realign perspective so it may be seen from the eyes and

experience of these living and dependent on placement services, so are ready for a rewarding experience.



The Ohio chapter of Foster Care Alumni of America is an extremely active and advocacy- effective state association with an affiliation to the national organization, which was established with the support of Casey Family Programs to connect alumni and transform the child welfare system. To become familiar with the dreams and aspirations of young people in and from foster care in Ohio click on the Ohio Chapter's blog at <http://ohiofostercarealumni.blogspot.com/>.

Foster care alumni share the same parent: the state. During their time in foster care, while as youth moved from one place to another, young people in care were not always able to build long-term emotional connections. The Ohio Chapter is especially cognizant of this and in the same way that older siblings might provide encouragement and guidance, older foster care alumni have much to share with their younger counterparts in care including a passion to support their dreams and goals. Alumni are uniquely aware of the challenges faced by young people in and from foster care. They have first-hand knowledge what it is like to age out of care and navigate the adult world. This knowledge helps them to serve as role models that foster children can overcome challenges and lead successful adult lives. They are "mothers without mothers" and "fathers without fathers."

The leadership of the Ohio chapter have helped to shape the planning and priorities of the Region 9 Ohio PREP, They should be contacted to assist

agencies to build independent living programs informed by the authenticity of first hand placement experience.

Ohio's Foster Alumni Chapter includes representatives from the [Casey Foundation](#) and [Orphan Foundation of America](#). They happily share experience and resources to assist young people aging out of care. They provide training and technical assistance in:

- **Building youth boards and local chapters:** They present the history of the foster care movement, the universal benefits of establishing a foster care alumni community, and how to work with and empower youth, young adults and alumni of foster care to start and sustain a local group.
- **Demystify emotional resiliency:** Regardless of where young people are placed, they need boundaries, emotional health, and the skills to build lifelong relationships. Alumni speakers offer specific tools that can help young people overcome the trauma of their pasts, and navigate adult relationships.
- **Strategic sharing:** Leaders are available to equip young people in and from foster care to share their stories strategically and to help them develop their writing and speaking skills to be effective advocates.
- **Creating a life management plan:** Alumni provide a workshop for young people about how they can create a personal mission statement and build a circle of restorative relationships in their lives.
- **Emotional Real Estate:** Created by an Ohio adoptee, Grace Hilliard, this workshop explores issues of personal security, emotional boundaries and interpersonal relationships.

The Ohio Chapter of the Foster Care Alumni of America welcomes contact and for professionals to take advantage of the insights they have to offer!

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## New Law to Help Youth Offenders

### Restart Their Futures

SB 337 became law earlier this summer. The legislation aimed at removing barriers to employment, housing, and education for non-violent ex-offenders. The law excludes most juvenile proceedings and adjudications from criminal records checks, expands eligibility to have juvenile cases sealed after probation, and allows juveniles to have credit for time served in detention centers. This change will make it easier for juvenile delinquents to secure jobs, housing and education.

The Youngstown Vindicator interviewed Judge Theresa Dellick of Mahoning County Juvenile Court about SB 337. Judge Dellick indicated that prior existing law did not permit juvenile court records to be included in background checks, but in practice, they were frequently being disclosed. "Youth are never convicted. They can be adjudicated delinquent. We have always told them to write 'no' on applications that asked if an individual had been convicted of a felony," advised Judge Dellick. Sometimes applicants would still mark yes, even if it was a juvenile case; or if they marked no, a background check might then turn up a juvenile record.

"Juvenile court is designed to rehabilitate. It should not carry over to their adult life. ... This helps pave the way for youth to become law-abiding tax-paying citizens," Judge Dellick said. There are exceptions to this law, such as adjudications for aggravated murder and sex offenses that trigger mandatory reporting. The new law also expands the eligibility to have a juvenile case sealed and now allows youths to have their records expunged six months after completing their probation instead of two years. Aggravated murder, murder and rape adjudications can never be expunged.

Advocates of the law say the changes will help young people move on with their lives. (Excerpted from <http://www.vindy.com/news/2012/jun/27/new-ohio-law-to-help-youth-offenders-by-/>)

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## **NEW RESOURCES FOR FOSTER PARENTS, OHIO PREP TRAINERS & CHILD-SERVING PROFESSIONALS**

### **Girl Talk: What High School Senior Girls Have to Say about Sex, Love, and Relationships**

In a new National Campaign to Prevent Teenage Pregnancy report, **Girl Talk: What High School Senior Girls Have to Say about Sex, Love, and Relationships**, 12th grade girls provide insights about everything from advice to younger girls, to their regrets, to what they really think about sex and relationships. Based on a new survey from the National Campaign and Seventeen magazine (related article in the August issue of Seventeen) excerpts from what they shared are reprinted below:

- 76% of senior girls who have had sex say they would change something about their first time if they could re-do it.
- 72% of senior girls say they have talked to their friends about contraception.
- 68% of senior girls say they will still want to talk to their parents about sex, love, relationships, and pregnancy prevention in the future just as much as they did while in high school.
- 43% of senior girls who have already had sex wish they had waited longer.

For a copy of the full report, click on <http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/girl-talk.pdf>.

For a copy of a tip sheet for parents, click on

<http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/girl-talk-tips-parents.pdf>

For a copy of a tip sheet from senior girls to younger teens, click on

<http://www.thenationalcampaign.org/resources/pdf/pubs/girl-talk-tips-teens.pdf>

### **Mental Health and Substance Use Problems of Children and Adolescents: A Guide for Child-Serving Organizations is Available Online**

A guide from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMSHA) was created to promote the early identification of children and adolescents with mental health and substance use problems as well as to provide guidance, tools, and resources for early identification of behavioral health issues. This guide is written for personnel working in child-serving organizations and the families of the children and adolescents being served.

The purpose of the guide is to address the approaches, methods, and strategies used to identify mental health and substance use problems of high-risk youth. Seven settings are addressed in this guide and include:

- Child welfare
- Early care and education
- Family, domestic violence, and runaway shelters
- Juvenile justice
- Mental health and substance abuse treatment for co-occurring disorders
- Primary care
- Schools and out-of-school programs

To download a copy of the guide, click on [http://www.samhsa.gov/children/508compliant\\_Identifying\\_MH\\_and\\_SU\\_Problems\\_1-30-2012.pdf](http://www.samhsa.gov/children/508compliant_Identifying_MH_and_SU_Problems_1-30-2012.pdf)



## Ohio PREP Regional 9 News

### The Ohio PREP Initiative Begins Year Two

Staff of the Nationwide Children's Hospital Region 9 Ohio PREP team along with their colleagues working in the other eight regions throughout Ohio is busy scheduling train-the-trainer workshops for public and private child-placement agencies from the Michigan border to the Ohio River and all along the 3 C Highway in Cleveland, Columbus and Cincinnati. Even more Ohio PREP training hours will be expended, as youth in care throughout the state log in thousands of group instructional sessions during grant year 2.

The Region 9 centralized training calendar has been set. A dedicated training room at the NCH Westerville Surgery Center, 455 Executive Campus Drive, Westerville, Ohio 43082 offers free parking and easy access. The 8-hour training session will be offered on:

**Aug 17, 2012**

**Sept 21, 2012**

**Nov 16, 2012**

**Jan 18, 2013**

**Jan 19, 2013**

**March 15, 2013**

**April 26, 2013**

**June 21, 2013**

**July 19, 2012**

The train-the-trainer session may also be conducted at placement agencies if there are a

sufficient number of participants requiring this workshop. Contact Tammy Derden B.S. Ed, MBA, CHES, PREP Project Manager at (614) 355-0658 or [Tammy.Derden@nationwidechildrens.org](mailto:Tammy.Derden@nationwidechildrens.org).

### Educational Coordinator Rekha Voruganti Joins the Region 9 Team



In August, Rekha Voruganti returns to Nationwide Children's Hospital as the Ohio PREP Region 9 Educational Coordinator. Several years ago while a student at The Ohio State University with dual degrees in Human Ecology and Chemistry, Rekha served as an intern to the Happy Healthy Preschooler Community Outreach Program where she taught low-income parents tools and skills to provide nutritious meals for their families. Since graduation, Rekha has had a steady progression of roles and responsibilities within the YMCA organization. She has worked as a corporate and community wellness coordinator, a health coach, a building supervisor.

Rekha took the Ohio PREP train-the-trainer workshop prior to accepting this new job to learn firsthand what the curriculum has about and to learn more about the needs of placement staff as reproductive health and independent living educators. Rekha was impressed with what she experienced at the workshop; the PREP Team are impressed with Rekha.

## Region 9 Child-Placing Agency Feature

There are over forty child-placing operating within the nine county regions. Each month one agency will be highlighted. These monthly features and an up-to-date listing of Ohio PREP trainers by agency will be posted on the regional website.



When the Columbus Boys Choir moved out of the state in the late nineteen forties, the women's service group sponsoring them looked for another outlet for their volunteerism. The juvenile court judge convinced them that a home for troubled boys was greatly needed. These women planned and determined they needed to raise \$100,000 to buy land, build and staff a country living family setting for problem boys. In 1951, using bake sales and charity bazaars, these women established The Buckeye Boy Ranch on farmland in Grove City. A video of this history may be found at <http://www.buckeyeranch.org/History.html>. One cottage, a couple who lived with the 10 boys and a visionary probation officer hired to head the Ranch started a comprehensive children and family behavioral healthcare system, which would serve thousands over the next 50 years.

By the 1980's, The Ranch had grown substantially and developed a premier reputation as a residential treatment center for boys with severe mental illness. The Ranch's Board and professional leadership understood that a single treatment resource could not well address the complexity of needs faced by the Central Ohio community. Over the second half of the Ranch's history to date a myriad of services have added at the Grove City

campus and within the community. Services were expanded to include girls and the state's youth who are deaf and require specialized levels of mental health care. Therapeutic foster care was added along with evidence-based in-home and outpatient services. The agency operated a day treatment program and school on the Columbus' West Side. Permanent Family Solutions Network is an innovative one-of-a-kind public/private child welfare program characterized by fast access and intensive case management that is preserving families where abuse and neglect are present to a degree that long-term family dissolution is readily. In addition to treatment service delivery, The Ranch is a community leader in creative child and family well-being prevention efforts. In the fall, The Ranch is adding Ohio PREP to its evidence-informed interventions for teens in its residential and therapeutic foster care program. Welcome aboard!

### Region 9 PREP Team

**Karen Heiser**, PREP Project Director

Karen.Heiser@nationwidechildrens.org 614-722-4901

**Tammy Derden**, PREP Project Manager

Tammy.Derden@nationwidechildrens.org 614-355-0658 or 614-600-0826

**Rekha Voruganti**, PREP Educational Coordinator

Rekha.Voruganti@nationwidechildrens.org 614-600-0818

**Dora Sterling**, PREP Project Consultant

Dora.Sterling@nationwidechildrens.org 614-937-1576

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