

**PREPPING Teen’s Responsible Decision Making**

**Happy New Year, starting 2013 with a Fresh Start!**

Lisa Dickson communications chair from Foster Care Alumni of America Ohio chapter ([www.fcaa-oh.org](http://www.fcaa-oh.org)) provides a poignant profile of former foster care youth John Diggins. Diggins candidly depicts what many foster care youth experience when developing within the foster care system and poignantly describes the process of “starting over”.

As former foster youth, we want our brothers and sisters of the system to know that they always have a seat at our table, their voices, talents, insights and mutual encouragement are what lies at the heart of this celebration and that it is an honor for us to stay in touch with them, as they enter into young adulthood, find their places in this world, and move beyond the shadows of their past to build bright futures and families of their own...

It takes a village to host these annual events, and we are deeply grateful for our alumni members, allies and sponsoring organizations for making it possible, in 2012, for Four Thanksgiving Dinners to be held, in SW, NW, NE and Central Ohio. The highlight of each these celebrations are inviting each participant to share their recent accomplishments and/or what they are most thankful for...

“My name is John Diggins and, as I shared during the third annual Northeast Thanksgiving Dinner in Cleveland Ohio, I am thankful that my life is for a



purpose. I was placed in foster care 11 days after I was born, and I remained in care right up until I turned 18 years old. I’m not sure where I would be without the foster care system, despite all of its flaws and wormholes. I am thankful for the caseworkers who serve in their role because they honestly care about children.

I am glad that I was in the system, because it made me a survivor. My father wasn’t there for me, and from his example, I learned the kind of person that I want not to be. I am thankful for all I have been through, and would do it all over again.

My experiences in foster care have put me in a position to see the world and people in a different way. I’ve watched and learned a lot about the system; who you can trust, and how to move forward to pursue your goals without doubting yourself. Today, I am a 22-year-old African American male. I am not a statistic or a failure. I am smart, calm and quick on my feet. I am this way because of the system. I am who I am because of where I’ve been... Being black in an all-white

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family... The years of being introduced as the “foster” son.... Being told, “We love you – you aren’t a job to us,” but why would you even need to say that if I’m not? My questions and observations led me to spend quality time in my room alone – and it was there that I learned to express myself through words.

I’m thankful to have found my way here to Ohio. I am originally from Philadelphia, and I was 19 years old when I came here. I didn’t tell anyone... I just packed up my bags and my desktop computer, and left. Foster care had taught me a lot about saying goodbye – and now, I wanted to say hello, to a new beginning.

I wasn’t sure what would be waiting for me when I arrived in Ohio and left the bus station. But I found my place in Lorain County. The children services staff went from being complete strangers to people that I could trust. I could tell them where I’d been, and what I wanted to achieve – and they actually cared enough to try to help me. Today, I hope my story will help my brothers and sisters of the foster care system. I want them to know that not everything is bad – just learn from it. Don’t let your anger turn into hate. Don’t let your pain turn into bitterness. Not everyone is bad; give people a chance. Just follow what your body tells you, and don’t allow your personal boundaries to be violated.

If I could give one piece of advice to help the next generation, it would be this: “Don’t rush to get out of the system.” My goal is for teens in foster care to focus on their dreams, turn them into to-do lists and surround themselves with people who will help them succeed. I don’t want them to hit the same brick walls that I did.”

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## New Ohio Foster Care Initiative Launched

Approximately a year ago, Attorney General Mike DeWine began a series of eight child summits convened throughout of state to examine the Ohio's child welfare system. Six themes emerged from feedback of a wide, representative array of stakeholders. These themes include:

- **Foster Parent Participation**

Despite being the 24/7 caregivers of the majority of children in care, resource families often are not permitted input into court decision-making regarding these children.

- **Guardians ad litem Non-Compliance with their Mandated Expectations**  
There is widespread complaint that the actual practices of guardians’ ad litem do not effectively represent their abused and neglected child clients.
- **Foster Youth Mentors**  
Foster teens advocate for mentors to assist them as they transition to adulthood and legal emancipation.
- **Normalizing the Life for Foster Youth**  
Youth in foster care urge they be permitted as normal a childhood as possible. Everyday occurrences like riding with buddies to school or sleeping over with friends are currently not permitted without full background checks on everyone involved.
- **Child Welfare Accountability and Funding**  
Few state dollars are expended on child welfare services with this drastically impacting the 43 counties without local levies for this purpose. The need for an independent, impartial, and confidential accountability mechanism such as an ombudsman office was also suggested.
- **Relook at the Implications and Outcomes of Planned Permanent Living Arrangement as Policy**  
This long-term foster care custody option almost guarantees that adolescents will age out of the child welfare system without family permanency or the likelihood of self-sufficiency success.

To address these major themes, Mike DeWine has formally kicked off a new initiative, the Ohio Foster Care Advisory Group. The Group is charged with issuing policy recommendations within the next 90 days. Key issues that will consider are:

- Ohio’s child custody status categories and permanency timelines
- How to enhance foster parent participation in juvenile courts
- Potential elimination of Guardians Ad Litem (GAL)

- Mandating and Funding Court Appointed Special Advocates
- Increase of mentoring programs for foster youth
- Regulatory changes to normalize youth experiences in foster care
- Restructure Ohio child welfare financing
- Review child welfare caseworker qualifications

A final report of policy recommendations is expected in March 2013. A copy of the Attorney General's findings can be found at <http://www.ohioattorneygeneral.gov/OhioAttorneyGeneral/files/7e/7ec1ad1e-5b60-43f2-9f0f-34491d8b8104.pdf>.

## Web Seminar Alert - When Financial Aid Backfires: And How to Not Get Burned

On Tuesday, January 8, 2013 from 10:00 to 11:30am, the John Burton Foundation will be sponsoring a webinar to discuss the ways in which foster youth can avoid the trap of incurring severe debt while attending college.

Foster youth attending colleges and universities rely heavily on financial aid including federal aid from the U.S. Department of Education. Many are not informed of key elements of federal grant restrictions and can inadvertently find themselves incurring financial aid over-payments, which, if not properly managed, can impact and even end their academic careers.

These severe impacts, however, can almost always be avoided with the right tools. The webinar will therefore focus on how foster youth can unintentionally incur debt; how to help them avoid such debt, and what can be done to avoid the potentially life-altering consequences that can accompany financial aid debt resulting from overpayment. To learn more about this important topic, contact Amy Lemley at the John Burton Foundation at [amy@johnburtonfoundation.org](mailto:amy@johnburtonfoundation.org).

## HEALTHCARE UPDATES:

### Caregiver Stress: Recognizing Signs of & Managing Stress

Positive and negative stress is a constant influence in the lives of foster parents. Therefore, foster parents should maximize the positive and minimize negative stressors in their everyday life. It may seem like there is nothing that can be done to remove the stress level you are experiencing. However, you have more control over your stress level than you think. The simple realization that you're in control of your life can be the foundation of managing your stress level.

#### What is Caregiver Stress?

Caregiver stress is the emotional strain of care-giving. Recent studies show that care-giving takes a toll on physical and emotional health. Caregivers are more likely to suffer from depression than their peers. Limited research suggests that caregivers are more likely to have health problems like diabetes and heart disease than non-caregivers.

Caring for another person takes a lot of time, effort and work. Plus, most caregivers juggle care-giving with full-time jobs and parenting. In the process, caregivers often put their own needs aside. Caregivers often report that it is difficult to look after their own health in terms of exercise, nutrition and doctor's visits. As a result, caregivers often end up feeling angry, anxious, isolated and sad.

Women caregivers are particularly prone to feeling stress and being overwhelmed. Studies show that female caregivers have more emotional and physical health problems, employment related problems, and financial strain than male caregivers.

It is important to note that caring for another person can also create positive emotional change. Aside from feeling stress, many caregivers say their role has had many positive effects on their lives. For example, caregivers report that their role makes them feel useful and gives them a sense of purpose. They say care-giving has made them feel they are making a difference in somebody's life. It can be helpful to discuss how care-giving has provided benefits to both the caregiver and the care recipient. This focus on the positive aspects of the experience can help give perspective and needed hope when the stress increases.

## Signs and Symptoms of Care Giver Stress

### Cognitive Symptoms

Memory Problems  
Inability to Concentrate  
Poor Judgment  
Seeing only the negative  
Anxious or racing thoughts  
Constant worrying

### Emotional Symptoms

Moodiness  
Irritability or short temper  
Agitation, inability to relax  
Feeling overwhelmed  
Sense of loneliness and isolation  
Depression

### Physical Symptoms

Aches and Pains  
Diarrhea or Constipation  
Nausea, dizziness  
Chest pain, rapid heartbeat  
Loss of sex drive  
Frequent Colds  
Headache or migraine

### Behavioral Symptoms

Eating more or less  
Sleeping too much or too little  
Isolation yourself from others  
Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities  
Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax  
Nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing)

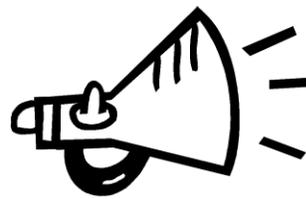
## Dealing with Stress, Burnout, and their Symptoms:

While unchecked stress is undeniably damaging, there are many things you can do to reduce its impact and cope with symptoms.

Learn stress management techniques that work for you - Stress management involves changing the stressful situation when you can, changing your reaction when you can't, taking care of yourself, and making time for rest and relaxation. Here are some examples:

- Get a hobby that is unrelated to your work
- Practice regular deep diaphragmatic breathing and/or meditation exercises
- Exercise at least 3-4 times per week
- Eat healthy, avoid foods with a lot of sugars, caffeine, and other stimulants
- Set healthy boundaries
- More than just learning to say “no”
- Learn acceptance strategies
- “Some things are outside my control”
- Strengthen the quality of your relationships
- You don't need many social supports, but only a few with whom you can trust and feel comfortable confiding in others

**Source:** *The Language of Emotional Intelligence* by Jeanne Segal, Ph.D.



## Ohio PREP Regional 9 News!

## Delivery Models for PREP

Region 9 is privileged to have a variety of agencies implementing PREP youth sessions. It is our goal to have each youth that participates in PREP to complete the curriculum. By considering the different barriers that may affect retention of youth more youth are more likely to complete the curriculum.

To better meet the needs of the youth they serve agencies have tailored their delivery of PREP youth sessions. Some delivery models that have worked successfully are two to three day workshops that can be held over weekends and school breaks. This model is most effective within foster care and residential/independent living. Foster care agencies that have mandatory programming for foster care parents can have PREP youth training coincide with their trainings as well.

Weekly sessions that can meet once or twice a week for an hour or two have worked very well with detained youth. Co-facilitating PREP session is great to get through materials and helps divide the work load with staff.

Having additional staff train with PREP is a sure fire way to have the implementation process of PREP easier as well.

If your agency or facility is interested with learning about more ways or have any suggestions on how to better implement PREP please contact Rekha Voruganti (rekha.voruganti@nationwidechildresn.org).

## Agency Highlight:

### Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center

The Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center is a maximum-security facility designed to house up to 132 juvenile who are in need of being detained in a restrictive environment. The FCJDC detains youth, for the length of time determined to be necessary by the court, to ensure protection of the public, or the

youth, depending upon the circumstances surrounding their legal situation.

Programs are schedules for all youth in the Detention Center and consist of education, tutorial services in Reading and Math, recreation activities, religious services, crisis counseling and structured presentations from community agencies.

**Our Mission:** The Medical Health Services Department is committed to providing the highest quality, medically necessary and professional medical care for the youth served within the Facility.

**Our Goal:** To create and advocate for optimal physical, emotional and mental health for every youth we serve.

For more information about the service and youth served by the Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center please visit <http://www.fccourts.org/drj/main.html>

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## ***In the spotlight ....***

### **Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center PREP Trainer!**



### **Ashura Crosby, BSN**

*About Ashura Crosby :*“RN, graduated with BSN for Ohio State University in 2004. I have 6 years Med-Surg(ical) experience on OSU’s Correctional Health Care Unit, 2 years’ experience in Adult Prison system. (I) have been with NCH for 1 year working at the JDC (and a) New mother to 1 year old. .”

*Ashura’s role within FCJDC and the youth that she serves:* “I am the RN Clinical Leader, or Nursing Supervisor.”

*How did you hear about PREP and when did you complete your training?* PREP was initially presented to me by Tammy (Derdin) and Rekha (Voruganti). I completed the PREP Instructor Training September 21, 2012.

*What are the benefits of teaching the PREP program to your youth?* “PREP has a very unique way of providing the information. It engages the youth and encourages them to actively participate in structured discussions regarding STDs/HIV and abstinence. The program not only lists the skills that youth need to prevent STDs/HIV and pregnancy, but actively teaches the youth to use the skills through practice/role play. Many of the youth who are receiving PREP have never had an adult sit down and talk with them regarding these topics.”

*As an instructor, what have you gained from teaching PREP?* “I have gained a better understanding of how to initiate dialogue regarding healthy relationship and sexual health with the youth. I have gained an appreciation for their idea, as young adults, regarding these topics.”

*Overall, do you find the Ohio PREP program beneficial to better serve your youth and your agency?* “YES!”

Region 9 is thankful to have such dedicated staff such as Ashura Crosby and the Franklin County Juvenile Detention Center to provide Ohio PREP to our youth.

If your agency is interested in providing Ohio PREP to your youth, please see the below training events and join the Region 9 PREP Team!

If you are a foster care or juvenile justice agency and would like to provide Ohio PREP to your youth, please contact Rekha Voruganti at (614)355-0759.

## Upcoming Instructor Training Events

Our Ohio PREP Train the Trainer workshop is a one-day 8 hour workshop. Below you will find dates for our upcoming PREP trainings.

**January 18, 2013**

**March 15, 2013**

**April 26, 2013**

**June 21, 2013**

**July 19, 2013**

To register for training or have questions, please call or email Rekha Voruganti, PREP Education Coordinator (614)355-0759 or email ([rekha.voruganti@nationwidechildrens.org](mailto:rekha.voruganti@nationwidechildrens.org))

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If you have any questions or would like to contribute to our newsletter, please email Rekha Voruganti ([rekha.voruganti@nationwidechildrens.org](mailto:rekha.voruganti@nationwidechildrens.org)). We appreciate your continual support and welcome any feedback!

*Funded by The Department of Health and Human Services, Administration on Children, Youth and Families (ACYF) and administered by the Ohio Department of Health, Bureau of Community Health and Patient-Centered Primary Care, School and Adolescent Health Program.*