

# Youth With Disabilities in Foster Care:

“A Double Dose  
of Different”

**Sue Badeau**  
sbadeau@aol.com



# Topics for Discussion

- Youth with Disabilities in Foster Care: Overview of some Facts
- What do these youth need?
- What special challenges do they face?
- Examples of and Opportunities for Collaboration



# Youth in Foster Care: Overview of Some Facts



# Children in foster care are at higher risk for and experience disabling conditions at a higher rate than children in the general population

- Children with an identified disability are more than **three times more likely to be maltreated** than other children (Sullivan & Knutson, 2000).
- Children in foster care are likely to suffer developmental delays, educational disruption, and physical and mental health problems (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001).



# Overview of Facts, cont



- Research also indicates that children in foster care have higher incidences and diagnoses of medical conditions such as asthma, low birth weight, prenatal exposure to illegal drugs or alcohol, exposure to HIV/AIDS, skin conditions, vision problems, growth delay, and dental caries. (Perez, 2004).
- Children that have been abused or neglected are at particular risk of experiencing mental health problems. The Child Welfare League of America reports that **more than half of the children in foster care have moderate to severe mental health issues.**

# Overview of Facts, cont

- Some families that cannot afford mental health services and are not eligible for Medicaid services have relinquished their children to foster care in order to obtain mental health services.
- **30% to 45% of children in foster care compared to 11% of all children ages 6 to 17 receive special education services**

(Jackson & Mueller, 2005).



# Foster Care Experience & Brain Development

- **Early experiences that can lead to attachment disorder may also have a profound impact on a child's learning**
- Brain pathways responsible for social perceptions, emotion, and empathy are the same ones that regulate communication and organization of memory.
- Higher levels of certain brain chemicals caused by chronic stress or trauma can damage a part of the brain called the hippocampus, making it hard to create and retain memories needed for learning.



# Youth with Disabilities in Foster Care: What do they need?



- Permanent Family Connections and Caring Adults
- A Voice in the Decisions that Impact their Lives
- Additional Tips from the Guideposts

---

# Permanent Family Connections & Caring Adults

“ Who wouldn't want a family?

Who wouldn't want to have a family to spend holidays with, to call when things don't go right, or to call when things are great to celebrate?

Who wouldn't want that?”

What happens when the Systems end, or fail? Or when The job is lost or company Closes?



# Supporting Permanency for Older Adolescents Through Positive Youth Development Approaches

- **Mentoring**
- **Life Books**
- **Person Centered Planning**
- **Family Group Conferencing**
- **Digital Storytelling**
- **Appreciative Inquiry**
- **Family to Family Approaches**
- **Youth Empowerment Approaches**



---

# Youth with Disabilities in Foster Care Have a Voice and Need to be Heard

Decisions made for me, not respecting who I am  
or want to be

Voicing words not just to be said,  
but to be heard

Words not just of sound but of thoughts

Speaking knowledge, spirit, and fact

Keeping faith, heart, and soul intact

Thinking of my future, who and where will I be

---

---

“These children, by virtue of their disability, are often invisible to the systems and courts that serve them”



# Ensuring that a Youth's Voice is Heard

- What are this youth's strengths?
- What is unique or special about this young person?
- How does this youth communicate his or her wants and needs?
- What kinds of activities does this young person find most enjoyable or interesting?
- What kinds of activities does this young person find most difficult or stressful?



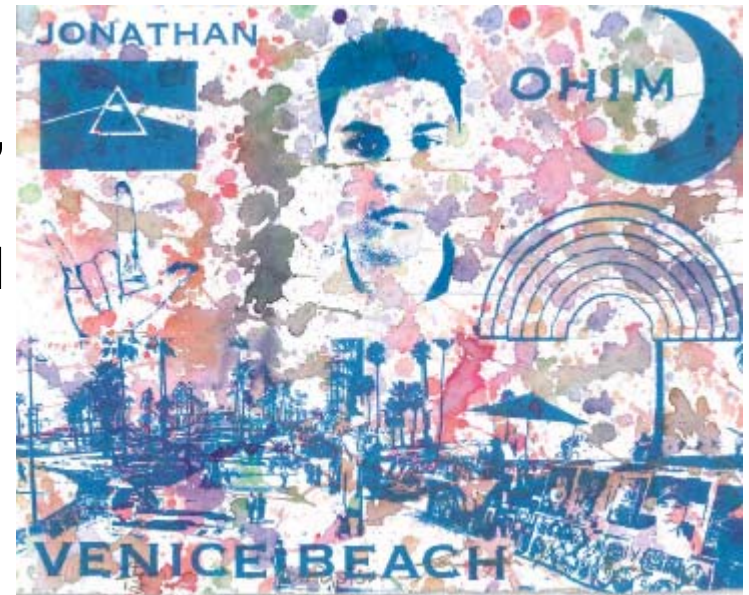
# Youth in Foster Care with Disabilities: Tips from the Guideposts

- Foster care system is inherently transient and these youth lack traditional family supports,
- And there is an expectation that they will live independently by the age of 18 ~
- Youth in foster care need special attention to the development of social and emotional skills
- Independent Living Plans that incorporate cross-organizational support systems including employment and training programs and which promote youth development and leadership.



# Tips from Guideposts, cont.

- Opportunities to obtain and maintain a valid driver's license, library card, voter registration card, birth certificate, medical and other treatment records, green card, and other critical personal documents.
- Safety education which prepares them to maintain their safety in personal relationships and in independent living situations
- Parenting education and child care



# Guideposts, cont

- Prioritized access to programs such as TRIO, WIA Programs with built-in activities such as “rites of passages” or special recognition of accomplishments.
- Additional emphasis on training in self-advocacy, self-esteem, self-reliance, self-determination and self-sufficiency.
- Ongoing assessments of personal development such as through the Ansell-Casey Life Skills Assessment.
- **Trained professionals, mentors and advocates who know how to access and make connections to and between the child welfare system and various disability programs and services.**



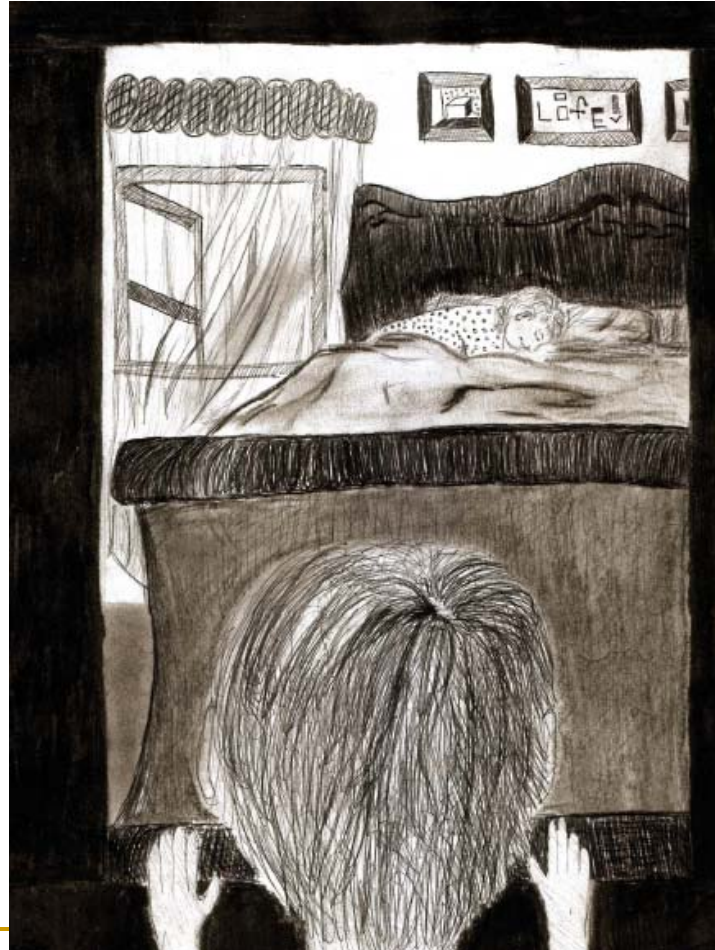
# Training opportunities should include:

- Basic knowledge about childhood disabilities, particularly those most prevalent among the foster care population
- Guidelines on how to interview children with a range of disabilities
- Guidelines on working with families caring for children with disabilities
- Information about the unique stresses and challenges faced by children with disabilities who are also abused and/or neglected
- Acknowledging and overcoming biases and assumptions regarding the cognitive, social/emotional and communication capacity of children with disabilities
- Information about disability-related resources for children and their caregivers in the community



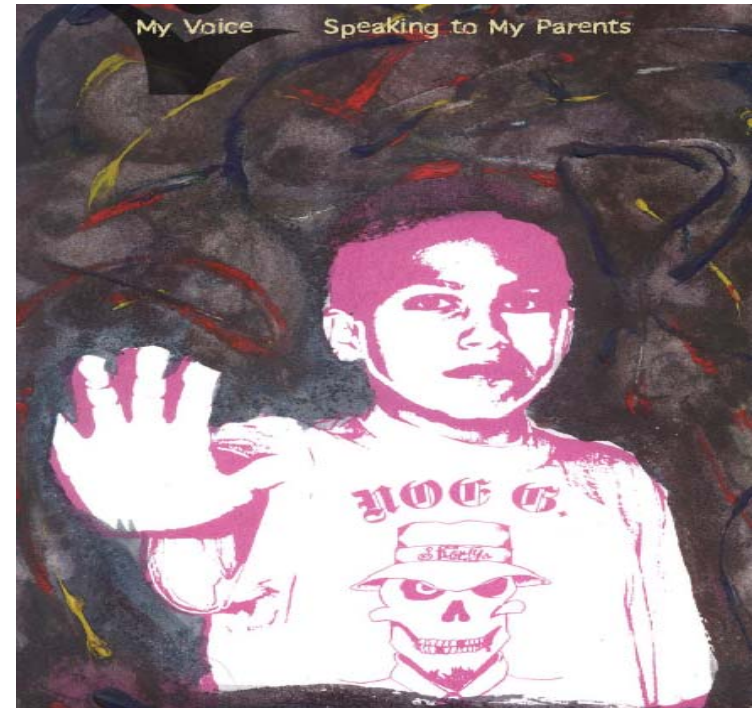
---

# Youth in Foster Care with Disabilities: Examples of and Opportunities for Collaboration & Funding



Youth with disabilities in foster care may be served by a range of service providers in addition to the child welfare

- system. Child welfare, health care, mental health, schools, courts, employment and training and vocational rehabilitation.
- Group home or residential treatment providers
- Although “case managers” from several of these systems seek to coordinate and help manage the child’s needs and services, they often do not talk to one another and may serve to add another layer of complexity and confusion in the lives of the child and his or her caregivers.



# Federal \$\$ Resources to Explore

- Chafee FCIA & ETV
- Title IV-E Training \$
- Medicaid TCM
- TANF
- Title IV-B: Safe and Stable Families
- CIP: Existing programs and 2 new programs
- HRTW



# Examples of Collaborations



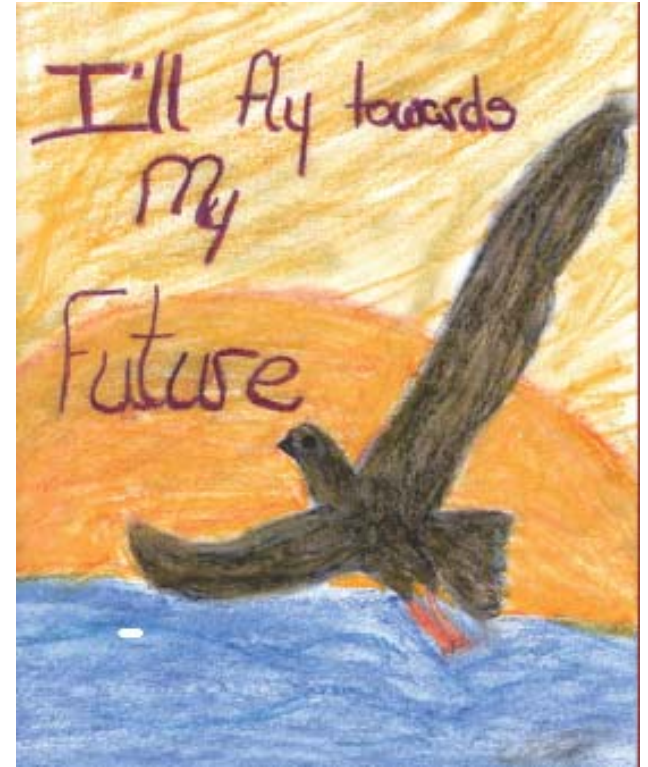
- DOL Demonstration grants
- DOL Federal Interagency Collaboration ~ New Strategic Vision for Youth Services
- Breakthrough Series Collaboratives
- NGA Policy Academy

# Looking Ahead

- Pew Commission Recommendations around financing reform
- Reauthorization of Safe and Stable Families funds
- Summary of other child welfare legislative issues:

<http://www.cwla.org/advocacy/2006legagenda.htm>

- Working on the remaining Gaps – i.e. funding for non-traditional post-secondary opportunities



Contact me for more info:  
Sue Badeau, [sbadeau@aol.com](mailto:sbadeau@aol.com)



---

**About the Artwork in this presentation:**  
**“MY VOICE, MY LIFE, MY FUTURE”**  
**MI VOZ, MI VIDA, MI FUTURO**  
**FOSTER YOUTH ART AND WRITING**

- There can be no more eloquent portrayal of what youth living in foster care experience than the window into their existence provided by the work of these young artists and writers.
- This project was assembled by Home At Last and the Children’s Law Center of Los Angeles in conjunction with the May, 2006 Foster Care Awareness Month activities around the country and with the generous support of The Pew Charitable Trusts.

□ May 2006

---

