

Encourage
Enrich
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THE BARNABAS

2021

Crisis Care
Training International

A Ministry of

WEC International

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FOCUS

In Focus



The need for foster care has been increasing over the last ten years due to increased parents' use of drugs, extreme poverty, physical and emotional abuse. Now, COVID has added even further strains on parents' ability to care for their children. The role of the family, as designed by God, is to be a place of safety and provision within a healthy environment. However, there are times when a child can not flourish and develop into all God created them to be due to other circumstances within the family. The hope and goal of foster care is to give children a place to be safe and healthy while their family works towards providing a more stable environment for their children. If the biological family is unable to do that, then there are times where the children stay within the foster system or have the opportunity to be adopted by another family.

According to the latest data provided by the Christian Alliance for Orphans (cafo.org), 425,054 children in the US alone are in out-of-home placements. If you would like to see the specific data for your county within the US, please go to their website. This edition of The Barnabas Letter provides insight into what some are doing to help children who age out of the foster care system. Additionally, the strains of today from a social worker's perspective are shared. A list of resources at the end provides you with tools to learn more about how you and your church may be able to get involved to help reduce the needs for foster care in the US and around the world. As always, may you be enriched, equipped, and encouraged as you seek God in how to respond!

Serving Him Together,

*Amy Wilson
Director of Education*



Who We Are

Empty Frames Initiative is [a non-profit](#) whose mission is to empower orphaned and vulnerable youth as they transition out of state care. We look to do this by providing training in life skills, counseling, community, and access to the Gospel.



We began in 2015, originally looking to take our mission overseas to Eastern Europe, where the needs of aged-out youth felt most pressing. After we launched and began to share our vision with the American church, we were quickly told that the needs in the United States were great and that our proposed program was needed here. Just like in Eastern Europe, and around the world, youth who age out of foster care are more vulnerable to homelessness, substance abuse, human trafficking, and incarceration. After praying and seeking, we accepted this redirection from God and began to look at how we could launch a project in the United States that could be applied around the world.

In the smallest example of our proposed work, we piloted our curriculum, "[Storytelling Through Photography](#)". This is an art therapy and literacy program and our CCTI training was extremely helpful in the development of this program. Seven individuals who had previous experiences in the foster care system met with us in 2018 and tested the program. In the process of working through the curriculum, we were able to demonstrate the relationships, healing, and support that can take place in an intentional community. The physical product of that project is our book, *The Story of Foster Care*.

Challenges

When we began our organization, we started by researching and gathering as much information about the aging out process as we could. Then, we had opportunities to ask youth who had already experienced the transition from state care to independence what they believed would have made their transition easier. Through a partnership with SaySo (Strong Able Youth Speaking Out), we were able to hold a round table discussion that focused on the biggest challenges facing youth when they leave the foster care system.

Continued...

Who We Are

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There were several considerations, but the one unanimous answer was that young adults need to be equipped with an understanding of safe relationships and healthy communication skills. The ability to communicate and to work through conflict impacts one's potential to maintain a job, utilize available resources, and engage with others in one's community.

Over the years we have seen the weight of this need, as close to 20,000 young adults age out of U.S. foster care every year. Many have no safe support system and struggle to build one as many do not recognize safe relationships or know how to build and maintain them.

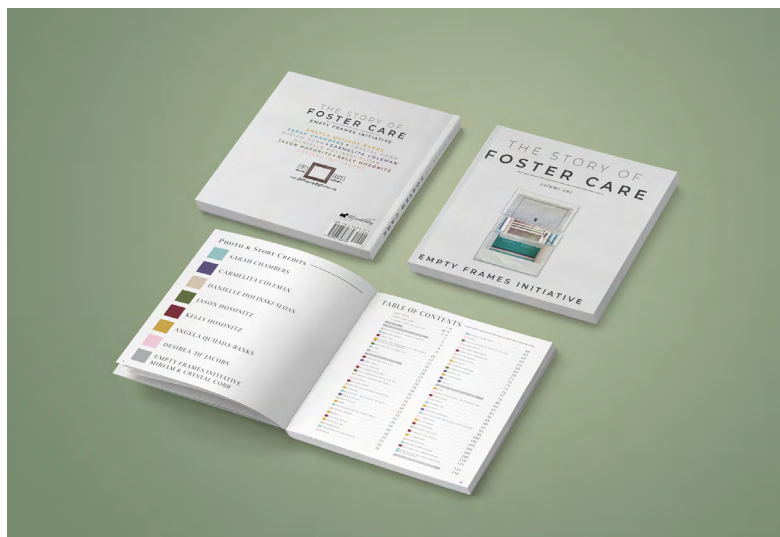
How Can the Church Get Involved

There are many ways that the church can step up to help youth aging out of state care! Here are a few places to start:

Prayer and getting into the Word. There is a very clear call on the church to care for this population and when the church steps into this sphere, eternity is impacted. (Isaiah 1:16-18, Exodus 22, Deuteronomy 10:17-19, Psalm 68:4-6, Psalm 10:14-19, Proverbs 3:27-28, John 14, James 1)

Volunteer with organizations in your community that are doing the work well. Local organizations working with foster care, homeless prevention, and/or human trafficking are a great place to start.

Be a connection for vulnerable families in your community. If you can be a support network for vulnerable families, you could help prevent youth from ever entering the foster care system.



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Who We Are

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Support our work. Empty Frames Initiative is still pursuing our first in-person space, and you can support us through prayer, giving, and volunteering. You can find more on our website: www.fillingemptyframes.org

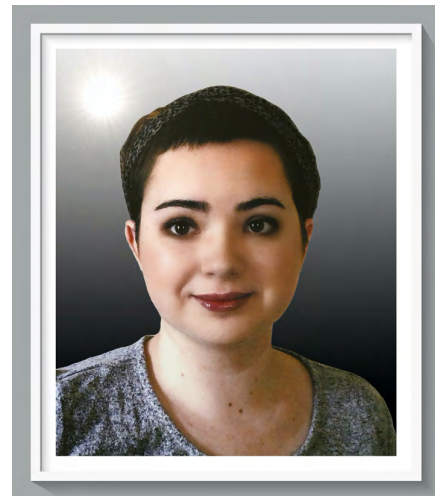
The END



Biography:

Miriam Cobb is founder and director at Empty Frames Initiative, a 501(c)(3) non-profit dedicated to empowering orphaned and vulnerable youth as they transition out of state care.

Within this role, Miriam advocates for youth exiting care, compiles new and successful resources for this population, and develops programs and curricula to meet this international need.



What is Easterseals?

Easterseals is a program that specializes in therapeutic foster care, which is a Medicaid billable service and requires additional training than your traditional foster care requirements. The foster kids in this program have been in the foster care system for some time. They have experienced various traumas including physical, verbal, and sexual abuse, neglect, homelessness, unsafe environments, parental substance abuse, and witnessing domestic violence. The children served are mostly school-age children who have behavioral and emotional challenges.



What did foster parents do PRE-COVID?

Before COVID-19, foster parents utilized various daycares, after-school programs, day treatments, therapies, and other resources to assist with childcare needs as well as therapeutic supports for their foster kids. Almost all of the therapeutic foster parents work full-time jobs and depend on the school and after-school/daycare settings to assist while they are at work, like many families.

Then, COVID happened.

When schools closed, and other daycare/after-school programs shut down, this added stress to the foster parents and kids as they were stuck in the house together 24/7 without the social outlets they were accustomed to having. In addition, Easterseals asked that the staff stop seeing families face to face unless it was necessary. Therapists also went from visiting the homes to zoom sessions with the kids. Homebound all day with your child is often stressful enough, but try to imagine with a foster child who has the added behavioral and emotional challenges.

What struggles did therapists incur during COVID with foster care?

The team had to adjust from visiting homes weekly and transporting kids to appointments and meetings to doing everything by zoom. Therapists struggled with engagement because kids were too tired at the end of the day from looking at computer screens, and they often did not want to do therapy. Many foster kids have visitation with their biological parents if they are working with the courts on getting their parental rights back. COVID also affected visitation for kids, and court cases were pushed back, causing delays in reunification efforts.

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Further Stress for The US Foster Care System

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Foster parents were working from home, trying to navigate virtual school, and in some cases, afraid to send their foster kids to respite (away for a weekend to another foster home to get a break) for fear of exposure to COVID.

What happened during COVID with the need for foster care?

Due to the COVID crisis, more referrals of kids have come into care for the first time. It is unclear if this is due to the COVID crisis, but the theory is that children who were already at risk of abuse or neglect were even more so due to parents losing jobs or being at home together more often, creating more stress. There have been struggles to place these referrals because the beds are full or foster parents are burnt out and/or fearful of taking a child into their home to risk exposure. Some of this has started to turn around with schools opening back, but there is still an increased number of referrals.

The most significant need is for more foster parents. There is not the capacity to place all the kids that need placing. Some Department of Social Services (DSS) agencies are resorting to kids sleeping on cots at the DSS office until they can find a bed available. The fantastic team of professionals working to help these kids are limited in what they can do when there are just not enough homes to support them.

Biography:

Julie Bruce is the program manager with Easterseals UCP for the child placement (foster care) program for the Triangle area of NC. Easterseals is a non-profit mental health and developmental disabilities agency that provides many services across the state. Julie has been working with the foster care program for about nine years and has been with Easterseals for nearly 11 years after working with another foster agency.





Foster the Family

@fosterthefamilyblog - Public Figure

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