



# Tips for Staff

## How to Use *Foster Care Youth United*:

-  To Train Teens (IL Programs)
-  To Train Adult Staff



### FIVE EASY STEPS

#### How to Use These Lessons to Run Workshop for Teens and Adults

1) Before the workshop, read the story to yourself and review the discussion questions and the activities to make sure they are suitable for your group. You may want to add or delete questions, change the activity based on your experience with the group, etc.

2) Introduce the story (briefly). Note that it's a true story by a teen in foster care. Mention the topic. You can ask if anyone has had experience with this topic.

3) Read the story aloud. The facilitator can do the reading, but if possible go around the room and have each person read a paragraph or two. That increases involvement and, for teens, helps reinforce their reading skills.

4) Ask the discussion questions. Remember: some questions are factual, and you want to get the facts of the story straight. However, many questions end with "why or why not?" These are open-ended questions. Try to be as nonjudgmental as possible with these questions. Encourage a range of opinions. If someone says something ridiculous, more often than not someone else in the group will challenge them. You don't need to.

5) Conduct the activity. (Note: If the activity is a role play, have the participants respond to the role play when it's over. They should be critical viewers, not passive listeners.)

When you're done take a minute to review the discussion, highlighting the most positive and thoughtful comments that were made.

Remember, you can use these stories in IL classes with teens to help them explore constructive solutions to the problems they face, or you can use them to help group home staff, social workers, law guardians, or foster parents to better understand the teens they work with.

#### In This Issue:

## THE HORROR OF DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

### Introduction

In the following articles, *FCYU* writers look at how domestic violence—suffered at the hands of mothers, fathers, and boyfriends—has affected their lives. They examine why it's often so hard to leave these kinds of relationships, and debate whether or not it's best for children to be removed from these kinds of homes and put into foster care.

### Beaten By Her Father

In "Leaving the Bastard," p. 2, Merli Desrosier describes being beaten bloody by her father after he found her with a boyfriend. Merli grew up watching her father subject her mother to the same kind of abuse. Yet Merli decides against pressing charges, for fear that her siblings will end up in a worse situation: foster care.

#### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Growing up, Merli watched her father abuse her mother and felt that there was nothing she could do about it. Why do you think she felt so helpless? How might you have handled the same situation?

—When Merli's father finds her with her boyfriend and beats her up, she decides not to press charges because she's afraid her brother and sister would end up in foster care. Do you think Merli did the right thing? Why or why not? If you were in her shoes, what would you have done?

—Merli goes into foster care, but her brother and sister continue to live with her father. She doesn't know if this is the best thing for them, because her father is hardly home and doesn't give them enough love. But she doesn't think they're in any danger, either. What do you think is best for Merli's brother and sister? What would you do to make sure they were being taken care of properly? What's the best way to judge that they're being taken care of?

—Watching her mother get abused as a child teaches Merli what to expect from her own relationships: "No man would ever put his hands on me and get away with it." What did you learn about relationships from your own parents? What kinds of relationships do you want to have? How will they be different from the one your parents had?

#### Group activity

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Merli writes: "I feel the world takes it lightly that women get abused." She isn't sure whether abused women need to change themselves, or whether there needs to be more help for them and for abusive men. Have the groups discuss

whether abused women need to change themselves, or whether there needs to be more help for them (and men who abuse). Go around the room, list the reactions on the board, and discuss.

## Keep Them Home, or Take Them Away?

Merli Desrosier, in “Don’t Add Trauma To Trauma,” and Princess Carr, in “Take Us Away,” (p. 5), debate whether it is better to leave kids in homes where domestic violence takes place, or to put them into foster care. Merli feels foster care should be a last resort before other steps are taken, while Princess, who grew up in a violent home, wishes she had been placed in foster care sooner.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—New York City’s child protection agency is no longer allowed to remove children from a home where the mother is being beaten by a husband or boyfriend (as long as the children are not being harmed also). Do you agree or disagree with this ruling? Why?

—Merli agrees that witnessing domestic abuse can be harmful, but foster care can also be harmful. What is your reaction to her point of view?

—Princess is angry at her mother because she put her abusive boyfriend ahead of her children. She wished she had been placed in foster care sooner. Did you have a similar or a different feeling about being placed in foster care? Why?

### Roleplay

Two teens. Teen #1 feels that kids who live in homes where there is violence between the parents should be placed in foster care. Teen #2 feels that it’s better to keep them home, as long as they are not directly harmed by the parents.

### Group activity

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Ask the groups to answer this question: what kinds of help should be provided to a family that is experiencing domestic violence? Go around the room, list the suggestions on the board, and discuss.

## Bruised By Her Boo

Ms. Chatterbox, in “Slave to Love,” p. 12, starts going out with a boy named Jay. At first, everything is “peaches and cream.” Then Jay starts cheating on her and beats up the writer. Ms. Chatterbox knows she’ll end up back together with him, even though it makes no



sense.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Even though Jay treats her badly, the writer says that she “can’t eat, sleep, think, feel or even know how to behave unless I have him in my life.” Why do you think she feels that way? Have you ever been in a similar situation?

—How did the writer’s family treat her when she was younger? How does this affect the kind of relationship she has with Jay?

—The writer has unprotected sex with Jay, even though she’s already had one abortion and Jay’s sleeping with other females. What is your reaction to this? Why do you think people engage in this kind of behavior, even though it’s dangerous?

—If you were the writer, would you return to Jay? Why or why not?

—What do you think will eventually happen in this relationship?

### Roleplay

Two teens, playing Ms. Chatterbox and a friend. Ms. Chatterbox decides to go back to Jay. Her friend thinks it’s not a good idea and that she has better options.

## A Letter to Dad

In “Dear Pops,” p. 16, Antwaun Garcia writes a letter to his father, confronting him about his violent behavior toward Antwaun’s mother. Antwaun has a lot of anger toward his dad, having been abandoned by him, but underneath the anger there is also love that has never been touched or revealed.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—What was Antwaun’s father like when Antwaun was very young? Why did his father change when Antwaun got older?

—What was Antwaun’s life like, growing up?



## Three Ways Your Teens Can Get Published

**1) Writing contest:** See p. 9. We offer \$175 in prizes. This month’s topic:

**“Do You Think Kids in Foster Care Are More Likely to Enter the Juvenile Justice System Than Kids Living at Home?”**

Ask the young people to be specific and to explain their reasons. You may want to discuss the topic with your group before they begin writing. The deadline for submissions is **May 1**.

**2) Letters to the Editor:** *FCYU* welcomes letters to the editor. Encourage youth to write to us about their reactions to the stories—the letters can be quite brief. Some of the lessons below can result in short letters to the magazine.

**3) Poetry:** See pps. 18-19. Encourage young people to send in their poems. (See related exercise for the story “Pushing Poetry,” p. 20, below.)

### A note on the lessons

The following lessons are designed to promote reflection on issues raised by the stories in *FCYU*. These lessons can be used with foster youth in independent living meetings, counseling sessions, or in other group activities, as well as in individual work with your clients. Each story is summarized briefly, followed by prompts that can be used to initiate discussion and/or brief writing assignments. In addition, group activities and roleplays are suggested for more active learning.

### A note on roleplays

You will need two or three teens to act out the suggested roleplays. Make sure the young people understand their roles by briefly reviewing the characters in the stories. Each roleplay participant has to try to convince the other of her point of view. Let the roleplay go on for about five minutes. Then have the group discuss what they've seen and relate it back to the story.

### A note on the group activities

These activities are designed to have students work together in pairs or small groups. They can then share their work with the larger group.

—Why do you think Antwaun wrote this article as a letter to his father? How might writing this article help Antwaun with his feelings?

—Why does Antwaun feel love underneath his hatred and anger toward his father?

### Writing activity

Ask teens to write a letter to a parent, sibling, or loved one, expressing their feelings about the past and what they want from the relationship in the future.

### Roleplay

Two teens, playing Antwaun. The friend can't understand why Antwaun also feels love for his father, who abandoned him. Antwaun explains why.

## RELATIONSHIPS THAT MATTER MOST

### He's 24...and She's 14

The anonymous writer in "Forbidden Love," p. 20, is 14 when she falls in love with a

24-year-old man. After years spent in foster care and not trusting people, the relationship with Julian helps the writer to love again and open up about her feelings. When Julian admits that he's not "in love" with the writer, she feels betrayed. They get back together, but their relationship is a struggle.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—The writer says, "I believe that if you're in love, it shouldn't matter how old, how young, how tall, how short the person is." Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—What happened in the writer's life, to make her close herself off from others and not trust them?

—What does Julian do that helps the writer to open up?

—Do you think, in general, that most older guys manipulate young girls they're involved with? Why or why not?

—The adoptive mother feels the relationship is wrong, that Julian is trying to take advantage of the writer. Do you agree or disagree with the adoptive mother? Why?

—Because she trusts Julian, the writer finds it easier to take risks being open with other people. Has a person had a similar impact on your life? (It could be a boyfriend or a girlfriend, a friend, or a loved one.) How did knowing this person change your relationships with others?

—After Julian says he's not "in love" with the writer, do you think the writer should have gotten back together with him? Why or why not?

### Roleplay

Two teens, playing the writer and the adoptive mother. The adoptive mother believes the relationship is wrong and should end. The writer explains why she needs Julian in her life.

### Sisterly Bonds

In "Finding Fam," p. 34, by Cynthia Orbes, and "Her Strength Is My Inspiration," p. 35, by Lauren Jenks, the two girls describe how they have become as close as sisters. Cynthia has lost both parents, and Lauren admires the strength she's shown.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Lauren befriends Cynthia when she notices that Cynthia is sad about the death of her mother. Was there a time in your life when someone became your close friend when you were going through a particularly difficult time? How did the friendship help you?

—Cynthia feels that she is part of Lauren's family, and that they are sisters. Do you feel the same way about someone and that



person's family? Who is it, and why do you feel that way?

—Lauren is inspired by how strong Cynthia is, even though she's lost both parents. Write about someone in your life who has inspired you with their strength and courage.

## AGING OUT

### Introduction

In the following articles, *FCYU* writers look at the issue of aging out and how to prepare for living independently.

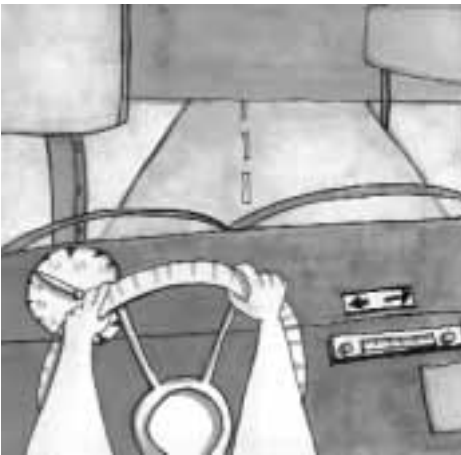
### Another Statistic?

Jasmenda Padilla, in "On the Road to Nowhere," p. 24, does not have a model roommate in her SILP (Supervised Independent Living Program) apartment. Instead of preparing for aging out, the roommate parties and generally fails to get with the program. Part of Jasmenda feels it's her roommate's own fault, but she also feels the system could have helped her more along the way.



## Summer Writing Workshop

This summer, from early July to mid-August, Foster Care Youth United will hold its 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Summer Writing Workshop at our office in Manhattan. Anyone 15-21 who lives in a group home, foster home, or on a campus is eligible to apply. Those selected will write articles for publication in FCYU and will receive a **\$400 stipend** upon successful completion of the workshop. Space is limited. To request an application or for more information, call: 212-279-0708, ext. 113 or ext. 114. **Deadline is June 1.**



Rosa Perin

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—What does the roommate reveal about her life, that may explain why she acts the way she does?

—The roommate says she wishes she had had someone like Jasmenda around her much earlier, to motivate her. Who has motivated you during your time in foster care? What is it about the person that makes you want to do your best?

—Part of Jasmenda blames her roommate for not taking responsibility for her life. But another part of her feels her roommate needed more help from the foster care system. Which way do you feel and why?

—Jasmenda writes: "Part of me feels that what she really needed most of all, all the years she was in care, was for someone to see beyond her wild, crazy front and help her deal with all her fears and sorrows..." What does Jasmenda mean by this? How could the system have helped the roommate "deal with all her fears and sorrows"?

### Group activity

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Ask the groups to answer this question: what could the SILP program do differently to make the roommate take the program seriously? Go around the room, list the suggestions on the board, and discuss.

## Setting Goals

Xavier Reyes, in "In The Driver's Seat," p. 26, describes how he set and achieved goals in order to live independently after foster care, and lays out a step-by-step plan for how foster youth can prepare for the future.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Xavier describes the difference between a weak and unrealistic goal, and a strong and realistic one. On a piece of paper, list three goals you have for preparing to leave the system and live independently. Are these goals weak or strong? Why?

—On a piece of paper, 1) write a list of goals that you want to accomplish, both short-term (within the next year) and long-term (within the next three to five years); 2) cross out the goals that are unrealistic; 3) list the remaining goals in order of importance; 4) for each goal, write out three steps you must take to reach it.

## AND FINALLY...

### Rhyming for Dollars

Miguel Ayala, in "Pushing Poetry," p. 20, describes how he turned to poetry to express his turbulent feelings and get better control of his pain, and ended up making money by selling it.

### Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—At first Miguel wants no part of writing poetry, but when he does he finds out he likes it. Is there something you now enjoy doing that you didn't like or resisted at first? What is it? What do you like about it? Why did you dislike it at first?

—Miguel's biggest inspiration is a poet named De La Vega. Who is your artistic inspiration and why? (It could be in art, writing, music, rap, or any other field.)

—Writing poetry helps Miguel work through his pain without lashing out so much at others. What helps you get better control of your emotions?

—Miguel's favorite time to write is after he's heard a good love song. What is your best time for creativity? What inspires you?



Gary Smith

### Group activity

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Ask the groups to write poems for submission to the FCYU Poetry Page (see pps. 18-19). Go around the room and have volunteers read their work.

### Roleplay

Two teens, playing Miguel and a friend. The friend thinks Miguel is soft. Miguel tells the friend why he prefers writing to fighting.

Visit us on the web at:  
[www.youthcomm.org](http://www.youthcomm.org)



Tips for Staff is written for the bulk subscribers to *New Youth Connections* to help them use the magazine more effectively with teens in their classes and programs.

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