

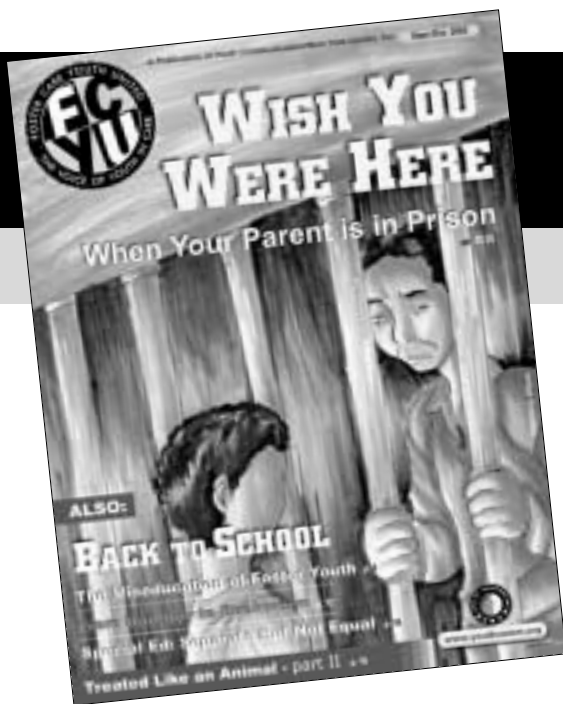


Tips for Staff

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 generally don't need to, except to maintain a safe and respectful atmosphere in the room.

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.

Back to School

Introduction:

In the following articles, *FCYU* writers explore some of the problems foster kids face when it comes to getting a good education. Some youth can't concentrate in school due to family or emotional problems; others move constantly from school to school or get stuck in special ed. Many others, however, find focus and meaning in their lives by doing well in school.

Stuck with a Label

In "The Miseducation of Foster Youth," p. 2, Ja'Nelle Earle describes how, when placed in a special school for group home kids, she rarely gets assigned work that is educational. The teachers are poorly trained and no one talks to her about preparing for college. But then she meets a social worker who encourages her, and Ja'Nelle thrives academically after transferring to a regular public school.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—When Ja'Nelle went to a special school for group home kids, she rarely got work that was educational. What has your school experience been like? Do you feel you are getting a good education? What would you like to learn about that you are not currently learning?

—Ja'Nelle isn't able to take school seriously when she's younger because she's experiencing emotional problems. How has your emotional situation or your living situation affected your ability to concentrate in school? What, if anything, would have helped you to concentrate better?

—Ja'Nelle said she never got much help in preparing for college when she was younger. Do you want to go to college? If so, are you getting adequate help in preparing for it? What kind of help do you need that you are currently not getting? How could you go about getting it?

—Because she's in foster care, teachers assume that Ja'Nelle isn't interested in school or college, or they're surprised to find out that she's smart. What kinds of assumptions have teachers made about you because you're in foster care? Why do you think they assume these things?

—Writing: Ja'Nelle eventually meets a social worker who encourages her to succeed in school. Is there a similar person in your life? Write a letter to that person, explaining how they've helped you.

Group activity:

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Tell the groups they are in charge of designing a school program specifically geared toward foster youth (it can be a separate school, or a part of a regular school). Who will the teachers be? How will they be trained? What will the classes be like? How will the subjects be taught? What kinds of special support or

services with the students receive? Go around the room, list the suggestions on the board, and discuss.

A Way to Focus

Natalie Kozakiewicz, in "Introduction" (p. 5), looks at how she is able to concentrate on her school studies, despite being orphaned at a young age and living in foster care. Some of her peers cut classes and sell drugs, but school is the one constant in Natalie's life, and being in foster care has made her focus harder on her goals.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Going into foster care helps Natalie to focus even more on doing well in school. Was that your school experience when you went into care? Were you able to concentrate and do well? Why or why not?

—What, in your opinion, are some of the things that prevent foster youth from doing well in school? What could schools do to better support foster youth in getting a good education? What can the foster care system do?

—Natalie writes, "School was something in my life that was consistent." In other words, it was always there and she could depend on it. What, in your life, is consistent? What can you depend on?

Who Belongs in Special Ed?

Charlene Carter, in "Separate But Not Equal," p. 6, writes about the controversy surrounding special ed placements for foster youth. Some kids are helped by the smaller classes and individualized instruction, but others are stuck for years in a chaotic atmosphere where little learning takes place. In accompanying articles, a special ed teacher and advocate discuss how the program is supposed to work.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Xavier Reyes describes special ed as being like "hell." The kids acted out and he had to watch his back all the time. Have you ever been in special education? What was the experience like? Was it similar to Xavier's? Do you feel you were helped by it or hurt by it? Why?

—What was the best experience you ever had in school? What made it a good experience?

—Do you feel challenged by the work you receive in school? Why or why not?

Group activity:

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Tell the groups they are in charge of

designing a school program specifically geared toward youth who have emotional or behavior problems (not necessarily foster kids). Who will the teachers be? How will they be trained? What will the classes be like? How will the subjects be taught? What kinds of special support or services with the students receive? Go around the room, list the suggestions on the board, and discuss.



Cliques, and More Cliques

In "Not My Style," p. 8, Natasha Santos explains why junior high is a hellhole: the cliques are constantly judging people and putting them down, and you have to choose whether to sit with the popular kids, the gossips, the nerds, or the anti-socials.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Are the cliques in your school, group home, or neighborhood similar to or different from the ones described by Natasha? How are they similar or different?

—Do you see yourself as being part of a

clique? What is it, and why do you belong to it?

—Of the cliques Natasha describes—the popular kids, the gossips, the nerds, and the anti-socials—which group would you choose to hang with? Why?

—Are cliques a positive or negative thing? Why?

Writing activity:

Ask teens to describe the cliques in their group home, school, or neighborhood. What are the people like? How do they dress? What are their interests? How do they talk?

Striving to Improve

In "Back to School," p. 10, Seandrea Evans is constantly finding ways to avoid school. But then she goes into foster care, and her foster mother won't allow her to cut. A caring teacher and a transfer to a better high school inspire her to apply herself, and she eventually goes on to college.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Seandrea writes, "No one really paid attention to whether I went to school or not." Have you ever been in a similar situation? What was it like? Did anyone eventually pay attention?

—Seandrea doesn't do well in school early in her life, but, luckily, she always liked to read. She also liked history and science. Are there subjects you have always liked (even when you weren't doing well in these subjects, or in school in general)? What are they and why do you like them?

—Seandrea likes her teacher, Dr. Garland, because he gets to know his students and puts extra time into helping them. Have you ever had a teacher like this in your life? What

Three Ways Your Teens Can Get Published

1) Writing contest: See p. 15. We offer \$175 in prizes. This month's topic:

"If You Could Send a Letter to Your Parents, What Would It Say?"

Ask the young people to be specific and to explain their reasoning. You may want to discuss the topic with your group before they begin writing. The deadline for submissions is November 4th.

2) Letters to the Editor: See p. 38. *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. 20-21. Encourage young people to send in their poems.

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 some cases, where we think a question is particularly suited for writing, we indicate that. 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.

was that teacher like? In general, what makes someone a good teacher?

—Seandrea is afraid to drop out of school because she doesn't want to be uneducated like her mother, who dropped out of school. She feels her mother could have achieved a lot more, had she stayed in school. Is there someone like that in your life, who could have achieved more had they gotten more education? Does that person inspire you to do well in school? Why or why not?

—Seandrea didn't have any role models growing up in the ghetto, but she eventually started to think that she could get more out of life than was handed to her. Did you ever have a similar change of attitude? What caused it?

—To reach her goals, Seandrea transfers to a better high school. What steps are you taking (or can you take) to get a good education?

Turning It Around

In "From Bad Boy to Bookworm", p. 12, Antwaun Garcia describes how he could barely read or write when he went into foster care at age 10. But his aunt makes him go to school and he quickly becomes a good student.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—For a long time, Antwaun never saw the point of school, or even of learning to read or write. He thought he could survive with a gun and some money. Did you ever feel that way? What changed your attitude toward school? If you haven't changed your attitude, what's kept you from doing so?

—Antwaun wants foster parents to step up and take responsibility for educating foster youth. In what ways can adults help you with your education? In what ways do you have to take on the responsibility yourself?

PARENTS IN PRISON

Introduction:

In the following essays, foster youth explore their complicated feelings about having incarcerated parents. They describe the anger and resentment of missing out on having a mother or father around, but also their ability to maintain contact, to understand, and even to forgive.



Stefan Vaubel

Missing Pops

In "Wish You Were Here", p. 22, Antwaun Garcia writes about having a father who was in jail during most of his childhood. At first they keep contact, then the letters stop and Antwaun feels alienated from the man who isn't there for him. But when his father finally gets out of jail, Antwaun finds he can have him in his life "without being angry."

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Antwaun said his father sold drugs because it was the only way for him to survive. Do you agree? Was it the only way for him to survive? Why or why not?

—Antwaun writes: "No matter what bad things or situations you've been in, the good ones last forever." What good times stand out for you, in your memories of your parents?

—Antwaun isn't ashamed to tell people his father is in prison. Would you feel the same way? Why or why not?

—Even though he hates his father for not being in his life, Antwaun also needs him. He forgives his father, so he can have him in his life "without being angry." Have you ever had similar mixed feelings about a parent? How do you feel about that parent now?

—Writing: Have you ever been separated from a parent, like Antwaun was (maybe not because of prison, but for another reason)? What impact has it had on you? Write a short letter to that person, explaining your feelings about being separated.

Letting Out the Feelings

In "Dealing With It", p. 25, Linda Rodriguez visits Children's Village, a residential treatment center in upstate New York, to interview youth who have parents in prison. The boys describe their conflicted and confusing feelings, and how participating in a peer support group helps them cope.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever participated in a support group with other teens? What was the experience like? Did it help you with the problem you were facing? Why or why not?

—Some kids who have parents in prison are confused about whether they should still look up to their parents. Have you ever been confused or conflicted about whether to look up to a parent? What made you confused?

—One young person in the article says he uses his father's example to be a peaceful person: because his father did bad things, the young person walks away from fights. In what ways have you either followed your parents' example, or done things differently?

Maintaining the Bond

In "Pen Pals," p. 27, Stevisha Taylor is only 3 when her father goes to jail. Banned by a court order from seeing him until she's 18, Stevisha maintains a close bond through frequent letters and phone calls.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever been separated from a parent for a long time? Were you able to keep in touch? If so, how did you keep in touch? If not, what prevented you?

—Have you ever bonded with someone just through writing letters? What enabled you

to bond that way?

—Stevisha says that learning about her father's experiences makes her angry, but also inspires her to make her life better. In what ways do you want your life to be better than your parents'? In what ways do you want the same things they had?

Prison Visits

In "Visiting Hours", p. 28, "Staying Connected," p. 31, and "45 Minutes on the Inside," p. 32, FCYU writers explore the various complications involved in visiting a parent in prison.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever had to visit a parent in prison? What was the experience like?

—How could prison visits be improved for prisoners and their families?

—Writing: When a parent is in prison, the child is left with a lot of unanswered questions. What questions do you still have for parent (or for someone else close to you, who you can't see)? Write a letter to that person. Submit it to the contest on p. 15.

Other Stories

Two Years in a Psych Ward

The anonymous writer in "Treated Like an Animal," p. 16, has spent almost two years in a psych ward when he gets fed up one day and in quick succession flattens five fellow residents. But when his therapist confronts him about his anger, the writer begins a gradual turnaround and gains control of his emotions.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Have you ever been confined to a mental institution, psychiatric ward, or diagnostic center? What was the experience like? How was it similar to or different from the experience of the writer?

—The writer is mad about being in the psych ward, about "having to suffer for other people." What does he mean by that? Have you ever had to "suffer for other people"? In what ways? How did it affect you?

—What is your reaction to the way the writer beat up the other kids? Have you ever done a similar thing? How did you feel about it then? How do you feel about it now?

—The writer is furious because he feels he's done all the right things—given up smoking, avoided fights, etc.—and he's still in the psych ward. Have you ever been in a similar

situation, where you felt you had done all that was expected of you, but weren't getting what you wanted? What eventually happened?

—When the therapist confronts the writer about his anger, it gets the writer thinking about how he has to change. Has anyone ever confronted you in a way that "got you thinking"? What impact did this have on you?

—Now, when the writer feels angry, he can take his mind "somewhere else" and not get angry. He also thinks before he speaks or acts. Are you able to do similar things to prevent from getting angry? If so, how did you learn to do these things? If you're not able to control your anger, what makes it hard for you to control it?

—At first, the writer feels "in control" by breaking the rules and acting negatively. Later, he gets the same feeling of being in control by following the rules and controlling his temper. Have you ever gone through a similar change, where you got satisfaction from positive rather than negative behavior? What was the behavior, and what caused you to change?



Gary Smith

Are Drug Laws Fair?

In "Tough on Crime, Tougher on Families," p. 33, Caroline Marrero is familiar with how drugs can destroy a family: her sister lost her kids to foster care because of drugs, and her brother lost his life. While Caroline believes that drug users and sellers can benefit from time in jail, she also believes that substance abusers are more often in need of treatment and rehabilitation. That's why she's become an activist striving to reform the punitive Rockefeller drug laws.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—Caroline knows from experience how drugs can affect the family. How have drugs affected yours?

—Do substance abusers need treatment and rehabilitation, or do they need jail?

—After reading this article, do you feel the drug laws should be relaxed? Why or why not?

—Caroline writes that drug users and

sellers sometimes need jail time to turn their lives around. Do you agree or disagree? Why?

—Why do you think people abuse drugs? What could be done to lessen drug abuse?

Roleplay:

Two teens. Teen #1 believes drug users and abusers should be locked up to set them straight. Teen #2 thinks treatment and rehab are a better way to help them.

Group activity:

Youth can work in pairs or in small groups. Tell the groups they are in charge of developing new drug laws. These laws can include prison time, as well as rehabilitation and treatment programs. They have to come up with a policy as to who gets prison, and who gets treatment. Go around the room, list the suggestions on the board, and discuss.

Go West, Young Girl

Rana Sino, in "How I Spent My Summer Vacation," p. 36, describes her first trip outside New York City—a camping vacation in Utah. She rafts, hikes, climbs, takes mud baths, and survives a harrowing experience: no MTV.

Prompts for discussion and/or writing:

—What has been your favorite place to visit outside New York City? What do you like about it?

—What was the best vacation you ever had? What was your worst vacation?

—Would you go on a trip like the one Rano describes? Why or why not?

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