

Intentions and Results

A Look Back at the Adoption and Safe Families Act

“You Have to Get It Together”

ASFA’s Impact on Parents and Families

By the writers of *Rise*, a magazine by and for parents, and compiled by Nora McCarthy and Lynne Miller

This paper collects the stories of parents who have written about their experiences with the child welfare system for *Rise*, a national magazine by and for system-involved parents. More than sixty parents have written for *Rise* over six years. The perspectives collected here reflect the lived experiences of families affected by the Adoption and Safe Families Act of 1997, Public Law 105-89. 105th Cong. 1st sess.

Good Intentions, Mixed Outcomes

To give families a fair chance, ASFA must clarify the supports that child welfare systems, courts and lawyers must provide.

By Lynne Miller.

As a parent advocate at a foster care agency, I work with parents to help them reunify with their children. In ten years of working with families, I’ve seen the positive and negative impact of ASFA.

For children whose parents cannot or will not change their behaviors, and who are lucky enough to find caring adoptive parents, ASFA can provide permanency, stability and a loving family. But for parents who want to reunify with their children, ASFA can either be a godsend or a nightmare. Its short timeframe for reunification can give child welfare professionals, lawyers, judges, and parents the push to move quickly toward reunification, helping families heal. Or it can be too quick a deadline for troubled parents working with a dysfunctional system, destroying a family.

I’ve seen how ASFA’s timeline can motivate parents. In one case, I met a parent after almost nine months had passed since her children entered care. This mother hadn’t completed any part of her service plan. She had either left or been dismissed from treatment programs and had never finished a parenting skills class.

I asked her, “Do you know what ASFA is and what it means for you?” “Yes,” she said, but with such hesitation that I had doubts. After I explained that she had 15 months to get her children out of care, she told me,

“No one ever explained the law so that I really understood what it meant and I was afraid to ask.”

Once mom realized how little time was left for her to get her act together, she buckled down and did the right thing. I am happy to say that her son is visiting over the weekends and they’ll soon get to trial discharge.

On the other hand, I am sorry to say I know too many families that have been destroyed by *misuse* of the ASFA law—parents who didn’t understand ASFA or weren’t properly advised about their rights; parents who were assigned caseworkers or lawyers that were either overworked or who just didn’t care; parents who faced judges that overlooked the agency’s failures but not the parents’.

I don’t know if all of these parents would have been able to reunify with their children in a reasonable amount of time if they’d been better informed and better treated by the professionals charged with helping them rebuild their families. But I do know that they faced not only the obstacles of poverty, addiction, or emotional distress but also the obstacles created by ASFA and the child welfare system itself.

I believe fundamental changes must be made to ASFA so that it is fair and functional in the real world. The most important change is that the federal government must define what it means when it says that agencies must make “diligent efforts” to help parents reconnect with their children. Some agencies connect parents to high-quality parenting classes, family therapy, and treatment programs, and give parents frequent visits with their children, visit coaches, and

visits in positive locations like libraries and parks. Others do little to connect parents to services. I’ve seen caseworkers tell parents with a drug problem that they need to seek help but do nothing more than give the parents a list of programs.

Agencies need clear standards, and they must be required to document their efforts. Judges must be required to suspend the 15-month timeline if agencies do not provide appropriate services to parents. Parent advocates help ensure that parents know their rights and responsibilities, and they inspire hope.

ASFA could also require agencies to use parent advocates (parents who have successfully reunified with their children) to assist workers in making these “diligent efforts” and to support parents in getting the help they need.

My biggest complaint is about the lousy legal representation most birth parents are provided. Many lawyers don’t return phone calls or even speak to their clients until five minutes before court. In court, I see lawyers sit there and never open their mouths. Then they shush parents who try to speak on their own behalf. I understand that lawyers are overworked, underpaid and overwhelmed, but parents can’t be held to higher standards than their lawyers!

For parents to reunify with their children quickly, they need lawyers that protect their rights, push for services and insist on regular visits. In New York City, we now have organizations that provide each parent with a team—a social worker, parent advocate and lawyer—and that seems to help parents reunify more quickly. ASFA needs to set standards for parents’ legal representation. Again, judges should suspend the ticking clock if court-appointed lawyers don’t do their jobs.

I believe ASFA is most unfair to parents who are unable to reunify with their children because of factors beyond their control—prison sentences or drug treatment programs longer than 15 months, court delays, or mental illnesses that may prevent parents from ever having sole custody.

For parents in these common situations, ASFA must provide clear guidance to judges and agencies, allowing them to create flexible custody situations instead of permanently terminating parental rights. Some parents are able to voluntarily relinquish their rights, signing agreements about the contact they will continue to have after they lose custody. All parents facing a termination of rights should have this option, and these agreements must be legally binding.

Finally, I believe that the way ASFA is financed sets systems against parents. Agencies that are paid per day

that children are in care already have a powerful incentive not to return foster youth home quickly. Adoption bonuses also reward child welfare systems for not reunifying children with their biological parents. As parent Lorie Cox has written, “It seemed like the social workers lined up foster/adoptive parents quickly, but took their time in getting me referrals for any services that were court ordered, such as drug treatment, therapy, and parenting classes I needed.” I would like ASFA to reward agencies financially for achieving timely reunifications.

In the stories that follow, you’ll see why these changes are so important. Lawrence loses a year with his son because of court delays. Jackie nearly loses her rights until a Child Protection Service worker fights for her. Jeanette’s child is in care for two years after she completes her service plan. Deb permanently loses contact with her son because she’s in prison and the adoptive family ignores the contact agreement they signed. Bertha needs more time to strengthen herself as a parent before her daughter comes home.

You’ll also see how deep the bond is between children and their parents. Despite long separations, Youshell and Tracey rebuilt their relationships with their children after reunification.

ASFA is right to try to shorten separations. No parents want to be separated from their child for more than 15 months, and children should return home as quickly as is safe. But ASFA must be a tool for ensuring that agencies, lawyers, judges, and parents act in good faith to get children home, not for punishing misinformed and unsupported parents and their children.

Three Long Years

Incompetent social workers kept my son in care.

By Jeanette Vega. © *Rise* 2009, excerpted with permission from *Rise* magazine.

When my son Remi went into care, I was crushed. Remi was my life, my love, my all. I needed help with my parenting, but we did not need to be separated.

I started working and doing all the services requested of me, trying to stay occupied, but that sadness always followed me around. I would go home by night and fall to sleep crying in my fiancé’s arms.

Within a year I finished all the services, found an apartment, was working, and began weekly unsupervised visits. The two hours just flew by. Remi missed me, so most of our visits were hugs and kisses. Things were looking brighter and I was getting ready to get my ’lil man back.

Come to find out that since my fiancé now lived

with me, he had to do parenting classes, counseling and anger management, even though he was no part of the incident that led Remi to be placed in care.

I just crumbled. I couldn't believe my ears. Why wasn't I told this in the beginning? The caseworker just suggested I kick my fiancé out the house.

On top of that, the caseworkers were coming and going like flies. We got a new caseworker every 5-6 months. More time went passing and there was nothing I could do. I began to get hate toward the system, and that's a strong word, a word I barely use. But they were dragging our case along as if my son's life could be put on hold. Finally we got weekend visits. Man, was I excited to see my little man sleeping in his bed in his house. Nothing could be better. For five months before he came home we had our weekends, and when he came home for good, he knew his room was waiting for him with his things.

Remi and I still had a bond, despite those three lost years. But he also came home a little aggravated, with strong emotions, as could be expected from making that transition. Maybe it was just in my head but Remi felt too empty to me. He would put on sad faces for no reason, or cry at night while he was asleep.

I caught myself falling to sleep near his bed on the floor, as if I never wanted him to leave my sight. We wanted nothing more than for Remi to feel at home and safe with us.

Too Much Pressure

I didn't think I could recover from my addiction in 15 months. By Jackie Crisp. © *Rise* 2009, excerpted with permission from *Rise* magazine.

When my children were taken out of my home, I immediately felt the pressure of the ASFA timeline. I knew I had a lot of work to do in a very short amount of time. Instead of motivating me, that fact kept me stagnant. I didn't even know where to start, and I had been addicted to drugs for a very long time. My addiction felt ingrained deep into the core of my being.

Despite the ASFA timeline, I didn't get clean for more than two years after my children were taken. I believe in my heart that the only reason I have my children back home today is because my CPS worker fought for me. She told me she saw something in me. She put her job on the line. At about the time I should have been getting my rights terminated, I was finally getting better. I give thanks to my CPS worker, because I could easily have lost my children forever.

Held Hostage

Family court delays have devastated my family.

By Lawrence Pratt. © *Rise*, web story, Feb. 2008, excerpted with permission from *Rise* magazine.

I was falsely accused of abusing my son Jacob and giving him Shaken Baby Syndrome. Even though I am falsely accused, the shame and stigma is a heavy load.

Because of horrible court delays, my infant remained in foster care for an entire year before the foster care system even gave me a chance to try to prove my innocence. It sickens me that babies and children are kept from their families because there is no due process. The system felt it could say to me, "Well, Mr. Pratt, it's so early in the case..." when after nine months the system's lawyers still had not proven that my son was at risk if he returned home. I hope that if more people understand how much my family has suffered, they will require the family court to move more quickly to spare other families.

Jacob's mother and I took him to the hospital on Christmas Day of 2005, when Jacob's legs and arms started twitching. We later learned that Jacob was having seizures. The doctor in the ER said that although Jacob had no fractures, no bruises, no retinal hemorrhages, she suspected Shaken Baby Syndrome. In other words, she suspected that we had done this to our child. On January 11, 2006, while still in the hospital, Jacob was remanded to foster care.

After that, a date was set for a Fact Finding Hearing (to determine whether Jacob should remain in care). It was set for July 22, 2006, six months after his removal.

We were anxious to get our day in court to prove our innocence and get Jacob back. During the six months that we waited, we complied with our service plan. We received CPR Certification, Parenting Children with Special Needs Certification, individual counseling, and, upon our urging, additional medical training. We were able to visit only two times per week for two hours per visit.

Then our hearing date got pushed back from July 2006 to January 2007—a full year from when Jacob went into care! We were to be separated from our son for an entire year simply because of court delays. Because we didn't feel we should have to—or could—wait a year for Jacob to come home, we asked for a special hearing to return Jacob home until the Fact Finding Hearing. After reviewing our medical evidence and hearing all we had done for Jacob since he went into care, the judge ruled on August 8, 2006, that Jacob could come home on August 15.

But our joy was very short lived. On August 10, 2006, the Administration for Children and Family Services (ACS) filed for and received a stay of the judge’s ruling (meaning they asked that it not be enforced) and filed an appeal. That meant that Jacob would have to stay in foster care at least until the appeal was heard. We were heartbroken.

Now we have a new trial scheduled: one day in January and two days in February, and then the dates jump to May and June. Who knows how long it will be until Jacob comes home. Was it really in his best interest for ACS to appeal the judge’s ruling that he could come home? Is it really in Jacob’s best interest to be in foster care?

Since Jacob’s mother and I had no previous knowledge of family court, we assumed that we would be given the benefit of the doubt, or at least that we would have our day in court. We felt assured because we are both college educated, registered voters, active in our community, and have never had any problems with domestic violence, drugs, or alcohol. However, our case never started until after Jacob was in custody for more than a year.

Jacob is talking, walking, playing—basically being a 2-year old. I am furious that my son has been in foster care all this time because of court delays. In two years, he has also lived in six different homes. We are extremely worried about his multiple moves and his current foster mother. I have been very disappointed with the consistently poor behavior of the agency. I continue to visit him, to love him, and to fight for him.

Signing Away My Son

I had to give up my rights because I’m incarcerated.

By Deborah McCabe. © *Rise*, Summer 2008, excerpted with permission from *Rise* magazine.

For the first three years of his life, my son Justin slept in my bed, curled up beside me. When I got locked up, my devastation at having to leave him was palpable to anyone I came in contact with. I could not speak his name without feeling a gut-wrenching pain.

When I was first incarcerated, Justin’s foster parents had reminded me of the unbreakable bond my son and I shared. I told them to keep my son away from me. After all, he was only 3. I thought his memory of me would fade and his life might even turn out normal. Despite my protests, they allowed me to talk on the phone with Justin weekly and brought him to visit often.

Our visits during those initial years were painful

but wondrous. When he saw me walk through the visiting room door, Justin would fly across the room and leap into my arms. His face would light up and he would shower my face with kisses and wipe away my tears with his little hands. Each time it seemed as if he had grown a little bit, or changed in some small, almost imperceptible way. I still remember the sound of his voice when “mommy” changed to “mom.”

Justin and I participated in the Family Reunion Program (FRP) at Bedford Hills Correctional Facility. With FRP, we were able to spend two days and nights in a trailer within the bounds of the facility. We were a real family again. One day a basketball bounced and knocked out his naturally loosened two front teeth. Another time I held his scrawny 6-year-old body in my arms and sang to him. He watched me sing so intently, staring up at me as if I was the sun, moon and stars all rolled in one.

It was at the end of one of those trailer visits that I finally got a glimpse of all the pain my baby felt. I asked him if he was ready to go and he actually stopped being strong for me and cried. I had not seen him cry until then, almost three years after my incarceration.

But as Justin grew older, things between his foster family and me began to change. What once seemed an ideal relationship between a mother and surrogate mother slowly turned sour. Justin began missing every other visit. Justin’s foster mother told me that Justin got depressed after visits and acted out by being disrespectful or breaking his possessions. Those were little signs, she told me, that “maybe the visits aren’t such a good idea.” I felt that if he were allowed to see me more often, then it would not be so devastating to say goodbye. They told me they knew what was best for him.

In 2001, I got an order from the court telling me to attend a hearing that would determine whether I would retain my rights to my son. By then, ASFA had passed. Children couldn’t stay in care for years and years. I had no family that could take Justin out of the system. My choices were: fight and have my rights terminated, or surrender my rights, sign a post-adoption contact agreement and pray they’d keep bringing him to visit. I chose to sign. I felt it would have been selfish to fight. He was with a family that loved him. I grew up in foster care and know how rare that can be. We agreed that he would visit me seven times a year. Three visits were supposed to be trailer visits, plus I’d get phone calls, pictures, and letters.

What I didn’t know was that his family would soon disregard the promises they made in court, and that, at that time, post-adoption contact agreements were

not legally binding in New York. Justin's family stood me up for the next two visits that we had arranged. They also stopped calling.

I was devastated. Visits with my son were what I looked forward to, what I lived for. How could I give up being his mommy? I became so depressed that I had to go on anti-depressants just to get out of bed in the morning.

I have had only two visits since I signed the adoption papers five years ago. I have spoken to my son only five times on the phone. I used to write him but he said he never got one letter. I used to send him things for his birthday but the store would refund my money after they sent it back.

The last time I saw Justin was in 2003. He was 9 years old. Two weeks ago he turned 14.

I call my son once a month. My advocate is able to place the call for me. It is rare for the woman who answers not to hang up when she hears my voice on the other end. If I am blessed to reach my son by phone, my advocate allows me extra time because she knows I only get to parent him for an about an hour each year.

My son's adoptive parents don't seem to realize how much they have hurt us both by keeping us apart. Still, I am very grateful to his adoptive parents for loving him, taking him when there was no one else, giving him the life I couldn't give, instilling good values in him, allowing him to have a childhood and protecting him.

I can hear how much he misses me when I talk to him. He always asks me when I am coming for him. Justin told me that he calls the toys he received from me his "special toys." He said he doesn't play with them but saves them so they won't break. My little brother did the same thing with toys from my mom when we were in foster care.

I hope to have the chance to be a mom to Justin again when I am released. I believe that no matter how old you are, you always need a mother's love.

Raising My Voice for Parents Inside Advocating to change a law's impact on families.

By Paulette Nelson, as told to Lynne Miller.
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When I was locked up, I left my son with family, but he was removed from their home because of neglect. It was two months before I found out where my son was. It was four months until I heard his voice again. In

prison, most of the time there's no one to help you with a child welfare case. If you don't know your rights, you're screwed.

Finally I met with a social worker who told me, "Listen, you have to get it together or they can take your son in 15 months." She explained the ASFA law to me.

I was scared. I went back to my dorm and shared my feelings with my bunkie. She said, "Oh, God, I have children in care, too." She started crying and crying, and we were crying together. Word travels fast in jail. We were in a big dorm with 50 women on one side. I'll tell you, the sound of 50 women crying is horrendous.

But since I've been released, I've learned a lot more about ASFA and about incarcerated mothers. 75 percent of women in prison have children. 11,000 children in New York state have mothers in prison. Can you imagine the sound of 11,000 children crying for their mothers?

While I was in prison, I got parenting and anger management classes and voluntarily entered treatment once I got out. I stayed on top of my lawyer and I made sure I was heard in court.

You know how it is. The judge, the lawyers—they all have their heads down, talking gibberish you don't understand, but you can stand up and be polite. I said, "Excuse me, your Honor, can I speak?" Of course, the judge told me to sit down, but I was able to ask, "Why am I here? What's going on? What can I do?" To them, it was an easy case because my sentence was short and I was eager to get services and get my son back. Still, my son was 12 when I got locked up and he's 14 now. He's coming home in a few months.

Since my release, I've also gotten involved in advocacy. I joined the Coalition for Women Prisoners, a New York state group with 1,000 members. We're trying to amend the ASFA law in New York so it doesn't hit incarcerated parents or parents in drug treatment so hard. Every state can make adjustments to ASFA. Some states are harsh toward parents in prison—they treat a sentence as a reason to file for termination of rights. Some say that incarceration alone is not a reason to terminate. Others go further—under certain conditions, they allow incarcerated parents and parents in drug treatment more time to reunify because of the barriers they face. That's what we'd like to see in New York and nationwide.

The advocacy work I'm doing has made me aware that there are people outside of prison who are fighting for our rights. I don't feel so helpless anymore. It's

so stressful to lose your child and go through these mental issues as a result. I felt good knowing: “There is help. I’m not alone.” And I know that nothing is going to change if you don’t speak out.

Taking It Slow

I have farther to go before Barbie comes home.

By Bertha Marquez. © *Rise*, Summer 2008, excerpted with permission from *Rise* magazine.

Many times when children go into foster care, the relationship between parents and children grows worse instead of better. Parents are usually stressed and angry that the system has invaded their lives. Often kids are too. They take that anger out on each other. But I’ve made efforts to prove to my daughter that although I was using drugs and she’s now in the system, no one and nothing is going to get in between our love.

When I visit Barbie at the agency, I am always on time, and Barbie and I play and color together. We talk about the things that are important to her and her growing up to be a responsible young lady. I hug her a lot and I look at her with love and grace.

Until recently, I had visits with Barbie just once a week, but now I have her for entire weekends. That means she could come home soon, but I am not rushing to have my daughter come home with me.

All of the services I have received already have helped me, but I still have farther to go. I still struggle with depression and anxiety, so I would like to go to therapy. I want to be more confident that I am ready to care for Barbie. After all, I have never dealt with the stress of having her home while I was clean, and I fear that I could overwhelm myself and relapse. I don’t want to do that to myself or to Barbie. Even though she seems strong, I know that Barbie is affected by all that she’s gone through. I think if she had to live with the fear of being removed again, that would be a tragedy.

When Barbie was home with me last weekend, we had a wonderful time. We cleaned her room and painted it two shades of light pink so she could feel comfortable sleeping there. I also bought her the Power Puff sleeping accessories and I put up a poster of Mickey Mouse, because that’s what I like, and she put up a poster of her favorite rap group.

But when Barbie and I went outside to jump rope and I told her to put her jacket on because it was chilly, Barbie refused. She gave me a little challenge. It was just a small thing, but I became nervous and distracted. I remembered when I was getting high and I would tell her to do something and she wouldn’t.

At those times, it felt like more than I could deal with, but now I know that it shouldn’t be. Still, I have those old feelings with me so I know I need help to learn how to deal with situations like those.

‘It Won’t Happen Again’

My children and I rebuilt our trust after three years

apart. By Youshell Williams. © *Rise*, web story, Nov. 2007, excerpted with permission from *Rise* magazine.

When my son was 6 years old and my daughter was 7, they went into foster care because I was very depressed and stopped sending them to school. My children were with my sister for three years. My sister was wonderful. She loved my children. When I visited my sister’s house, I was able to witness the attention she lavished on them. I am truly lucky and blessed.

But the separation took its toll. As time passed I became afraid to get my children back, afraid to fail again. Seeing what my sister could provide made me fear that I would mess up my children’s lives if I took them back. My sister and her husband did not live in the ghetto. They lived in a nice neighborhood with better schools, better everything.

I had high hopes for my children, and still do. I wanted my children to experience the good side of life. I knew my children needed my love and my parenting, and I knew they had more in my house than I ever had growing up. But I believed my children were happy and might think, “Then Mommy came and messed everything up once again.”

My sister woke me up. One day she said to me, “It doesn’t seem like you want them back.” My new worker helped, too. She explained what steps to take to get my children home. Without her, I believe my case could’ve dragged on forever. Soon enough, my children came home.

After such a long absence, though, it took a long time for my children and me to get back in the groove. There was tension in our house. My children definitely resented me and the slum they had come home to, and showed it: lots of arguments, disrespect and shouting that “You should have left us at Aunt Gina’s!” Plus a whole lot of pretending that they did not hear me or my rules.

Luckily, I was required to go to a preventive agency when my kids returned home. I loved my second worker. Every week we went to her office to talk with her as a family. My favorite part was a game where we all had to say words that expressed how we were feeling at that moment, and how we felt about each other.

I found out a lot. My children were disappointed in me. It had been shocking to them to watch me fall so hard. They were scared that I might fall once again. They wanted to stay with Aunt Gina because she showed strength consistently and they could trust her.

At home all I heard was their anger. When we played the games, I was able to understand their fears and frustration. They feared that our family would not recover. They were asking, “Where do we go from here?”

I was determined to put their fears to rest by telling them and showing them that Mommy would never give up on herself again. I also realized that we would never get those three years back, but we could move forward and make new memories, happier memories.

Our worker encouraged us to keep building our trust in each other. She’d say, “Change can be a good thing. It helps you grow as a family.”

As my children saw my persistence in listening to them and in rebuilding our family, it was easier for them to begin to trust me. I don’t know how completely my children trust me now, but we are more comfortable with each other. For a long time, I didn’t think that I deserved my children, but now I know that no one else can be a better mother to them.

‘Love Is Not Written in a Court Order’

Helping the system remember the strength of family bonds.

By Tracey Carter. © *Rise*, Fall 2006, excerpted with permission from *Rise* magazine.

In September I traveled with my 23-year-old son to speak at “Families for Life: Addressing the Needs of Older Children and Youth in Foster Care,” a conference convened by the Annie E. Casey Foundation. James and I were doing a workshop together about the strength of family bonds. Even though James and I were separated by my drug addiction and his adoption, our relationship is growing now.

I hoped that seeing the way my son and I connect in spite of our long separation would show foster care system staff and policymakers that reconnection can happen. My rights were terminated but our love did not end.

At the conference, I explained some of the history that led to James’ placement in foster care. When James was born in 1983, I was 21 and already had one child. We lived in Queens and I worked at the grocery store owned by my children’s father. I was comfortable. But around 1986, my life started going downhill. First I found out that my kids’ father sold

drugs out of the store. Then the feds came and shut down the store and destroyed our house. My kids’ father ran and left us.

I didn’t know what to do. I had no income. I was pregnant with my fourth child. I was depending on public assistance. I wound up going to my sister’s in Brooklyn. She helped me out a lot, but I was stressed out. Being abandoned by my kids’ father also reminded me of my parents’ deaths when I was very young, and I was depressed. That’s when I started hanging out and was introduced to what we now call crack.

I started by using drugs on the weekends. Eventually I stopped coming home. Finally my sister gave me an ultimatum: Either come home and be a mother or stay in the streets. I chose to stay out.

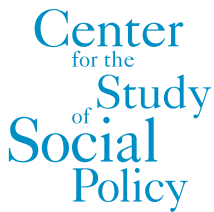
One day I got a paper from court and I gave up my rights to my children. I found out years later that my sister adopted them. My sister didn’t want to do that, but the system threatened her. If she didn’t adopt, they were going to put the kids in other foster homes.

By 2004 I was drug free, raising my two youngest children with my husband, and working as a parent leader at the Child Welfare Organizing Project, an advocacy group for birth parents. I’d reconnected with my family and found out James was in the Army—in Iraq. James was looking to reconnect with me as well.

When he came home, we finally got a chance to talk. He said he had thought about me often. We hugged and cried, then we laughed. I was proud of his strength and courage.

My family had only told James that I was sick. They hoped that one day I would tell James the whole truth. When I told him my story, he said he felt better hearing it from me. He asked me a lot of questions. I was straight and honest with him. I apologized for not being there for him and told him, “I can’t change the past. I’m just grateful that you still accept me.”

At the conference, James had tears in his eyes, but it felt good to be able to talk openly. I think our workshop helped the system professionals remember the strength of children’s bonds with their parents, and their parents’ bonds with their kids. Love is permanent, not what is written in a court order. You can separate a mother and child but the love will still be there. I hope policymakers will find ways to help birth parents and kids stay connected, even if there’s a long time when the parent cannot take care of her kids.

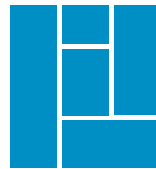


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