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In His Own Words: Thoughts of an FCCS Youth

By Elizabeth Crabtree

In child welfare, as with most social service agencies, everything is measured: the number of children and youth served each year, the number of investigations completed, and the number of youth in paid placement. These numbers are published, discussed and dissected to help indicate patterns of behavior in the community or the significance of the response and interventions needed. But behind every number is a name and every statistic represents a life that is impacted by the myriad of barriers and difficulties that a family involved with Franklin County Children Services may face. Some of these youth remain in agency care until they turn 21 and find themselves transitioning into adulthood without the support of family or a community. One such youth, 21-year-old Dauntae, is still on the journey to build a strong future for himself with support from the agency’s College-Bound Mentoring program.

“I would consider myself strong minded and independent, and I have these traits because of my life experiences,” Dauntae says. Between offering yes ma’ams and no ma’ams during a phone conversation, Dauntae explains that he left his home at age 16 and had to grow up quickly. It was at that time that Dauntae found himself in the care of Children Services. He was later referred for mentoring services. What others might view as a difficulty, Dauntae worked to see in a different light. “Everything isn’t bad,” he says. “You can turn it into something good, including kids. What they see when they are young forms who they become. But that can be changed.” Dauntae’s message is to not give up on youth who have had rough life experiences, because if they receive the right help, anything can be possible for them.

When asked what he wishes people in the community understood about youth in foster care or who are involved with Children Services, Dauntae responds without hesitation. “Everyone’s story is different,” he says. “Not everyone has choices about where or how they live. Sometimes it is because of their age, their situation or their resources.” He hopes that people keep an open mind and heart when considering these youth.

Dauntae also says, “If it wasn’t for Children Services, I would not be who I am today.” He is still receiving support through the agency’s College-Bound Mentoring program and has a close relationship with his mentor. Together, they are working on next steps for Dauntae so that he can pursue and someday obtain his dreams. Dauntae hopes to own a business and have some financial freedom. He believes that success begins with him and how he handles the one area of his life that he can control: his perception. “I hope for the best and make the best out of any situation,” he says.

To become a mentor for a youth like Dauntae, visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov or email FCCSVolunteers@fccs.us.

To support Holiday Wish so youth like Dauntae receive a gift for the holidays, visit fccsholidaywish.franklincountyohio.gov or call us at (614) 275-2525.
Teen Finds Permanency with Loving Family
By Marion Thompson

No one is ever too old to find a forever family. Just ask 17-year-old Sariah who was recently adopted by her foster mother Corena Brady. Sariah is now part of a household that includes nine children, among whom are Brady’s grandchildren, adopted children and foster children. Sariah has been part of the Brady household since 2015, after living with relatives and in residential facilities. Her adoption was recently finalized. Both Sariah and her new mom are strong advocates for foster care and adoption.

“This is the family that I was always looking for,” says Sariah. She is happy to be part of a large family and she and her new mom have become very close. “Sariah must like organized chaos...We’re thick as thieves,” says Brady. However, things weren’t always so easy. After experiencing trauma, Sariah had to learn to not be defensive while interacting with her foster mom. She says, “If there is a problem or I do something wrong, we talk about it. I wasn’t used to that.”

“She had her gloves up, even before a fight could begin,” says Brady. “Now, she knows she’s in a safe place.”

The Brady family is still growing. “I always wanted to adopt, so when my biological children left home, I started fostering and adopting. I’d like to do more,” says Brady. While she is eager to help more children, Brady focuses on maintaining a good environment for those already in her home. “When I consider taking on another child, I talk to all of the kids and get their input before making a decision, so we can do what’s best for everybody.”

Both Brady and Sariah encourage others to become foster or adoptive parents, especially to teenagers. “I’m hooked on teens,” says Brady. “If people will give them a chance, they’ll see the positives. A lot of times their trust in people has been broken and once you build a sense of trust with them, they turn around quickly.” “You just need to meet us halfway,” adds Sariah.

November is National Adoption Month. Visit us online at childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov to learn more about FCCS’s adoptions program. To learn how to become a foster parent in Franklin County, visit fostercare.fccs.us.

Prevention in Times of Crisis
By Jim Ryan

Ohio’s opioid epidemic has had tremendous repercussions for Franklin County Children Services and the children and families the agency serves. Yet, as we triage the opioid crisis or any other challenges which require a response, as a community we must also ensure prevention remains a priority.

Prevention science shows us what works – and what doesn’t – when we want to prevent substance-use disorders. We can metaphorically “vaccinate” children and adults to significantly decrease the likelihood they will experience substance use and other behavioral disorders in their lifetime.

What does a substance use disorder “vaccine” look like?

1. Reducing or eliminating trauma. Trauma, particularly in childhood, changes how our brains function. When we prevent abuse and neglect, we are also increasing protection against substance use disorders.

2. Building connections. Strong relationships in family systems, neighborhoods, workplaces, and schools can help protect against substance use disorders. The relationships are even more meaningful for children when the adults in those environments are providing appropriate boundaries and communicating consistent, “no use” messages to kids. When youth (and adults) see themselves as part of a community, healthy choices are much more prevalent.

3. Prevention education. Age-appropriate, prevention-focused education can also serve as protection for youth and adults. Note that not all education is appropriate for all ages. Educating youth about particular substances or exposing them to stories of those in recovery from substance use disorders may seem to make sense. But research shows that those are not effective education strategies. Instead, youth should be provided with evidence-based, skills-driven, social-emotional prevention education.

4. Norms and policies. Appropriate policies and community norms can serve many prevention purposes, from limiting access – for example, a new Ohio law limits the duration of opioid prescriptions – to reinforcing expectations of healthy decision-making. When our communities are at their healthiest (see #2), they establish and support norms that encourage health and wellness.

(Continued on the following page.)
A winding journey through numerous foster homes, Carma Lacy’s childhood was anything but typical.

Current program administrator at the Workforce Development Board of Central Ohio, Lacy came into the care of Franklin County Children Services when she was just two years old. She’d had an accident while under the care of her alcoholic mother which left her permanently vision impaired. Because of safety concerns, Lacy was removed from her home and ended up spending her entire childhood within the child welfare system. Frequently separated from her three siblings, she was often relocated through no fault of her own, moving from foster home to foster home. By the time she emancipated from FCCS when she was 18, Lacy had lived with a dozen different foster families and stayed briefly in a group home.

While Lacy, now 39, clearly wouldn’t have chosen to spend her childhood this way, she’s not angry or bitter. In fact, she says she is grateful, knowing that this unusual collection of experiences shaped her into who she is today. “I am the example of what happens when the village raises the kid,” Lacy says. “I appreciate what the foster care experience did for me. I wouldn’t be who I am without it.”

For a long time Lacy, who is an accomplished professional with two master’s degrees and a devoted mother to two sons, didn’t talk about her unconventional childhood. She was well aware of the stigmas attached to kids who have been in foster care, that they’re “bad and broken” and frequently the victims of lowered expectations, she says. “Overcoming the limits that people set for you” was one of the biggest challenges she experienced while involved with FCCS, she remembers.

Once she was in her 30s, Lacy says she decided that the secret of how she got through her own experience in foster care was for her to “be the example of what happens when the village raises the kid.” Lacy says. She was recently there for a 17-year-old girl who reminded her of herself back when she was a teen. Lacy contacted the youth and provided a little tough love and positive direction. “I need her to know why she matters,” Lacy says.

Youth involved in the child welfare system have a critical need for committed mentors, Lacy says. Both her mom and dad were in foster care as children and eventually became teen parents without any guidance or support. She feels that a mentor might have altered their trajectory and broken the child welfare cycle in her family. For a child in foster care who has faced serious adversity, having a devoted mentor to count on can make all the difference in creating a better outcome. “If you change the life of this kid, you change the lives of future generations,” Lacy says.

To learn about becoming a mentor for a FCCS youth visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov.

Opioid Crisis (continued)

We must be responsive to the crises of our times. Let’s also simultaneously recommit to prevention. For when prevention is comprehensive and intentional, the crises are fewer and less brutal.

(Jim Ryan is a certified trainer and consultant and has been a volunteer with FCCS for 29 years. He is currently a member of the agency’s Volunteer Services Advisory Committee.)

**Article Sources:**
Foster Homes Needed for Teens
By Valancia Turner

Teens face many challenges and difficulties throughout their lives that require love, guidance, and stability. Franklin County currently has hundreds of children waiting for foster homes and many of them are teenagers. According to the Public Children Services Association of Ohio 2016 Fact Book, about 41% of children in custody are between the ages of 12 and 17. While the number of children in need of foster care continues to rise, the number of available foster homes has not, making the placement of teens in foster homes more difficult.

Many teens are placed in residential or group homes when they cannot be placed with a family member or in a foster home. That number significantly increases for teen girls and African-American teen boys. Becoming an adult and not having the support of family can be frightening. The need for family and a sense of belonging does not lessen as youth approach adulthood. Teenagers still need encouragement and support to guide them throughout life. This is especially true of those who have experienced childhood trauma. Placing teens in stable homes can truly increase their chances of having positive outcomes when transitioning into adulthood as they are more likely to complete high school, go to college, and be more secure emotionally. Having a support system there to provide sound advice is critical for youth who are faced with making adult decisions like pursuing higher education, budgeting, maintaining a household and employment.

Give a teenager a stable home by becoming a foster parent for a youth served by Franklin County Children Services. Give them hope that their future will be brighter than their past. Foster Hope, Foster Love, Foster Teens in Franklin County. For more information, please visit fostercare.fccs.us or call the Foster Care phone line at (614) 275-2711.

Grant a Child’s Holiday Wish
By Bruce Cadwallader

Thanks to the generosity of people like you, FCCS has granted the wishes of more than 170,000 children through Holiday Wish for more than 50 years. These are children who may have experienced abuse, neglect or other difficult home conditions. They rely on the generosity of our community to put the joy back into their holidays. Last year, our community provided gifts for more than 6,000 children. We need your help again this year! FCCS relies on donations of funds and toys, as the agency’s tax dollars cannot be used to support Holiday Wish.

Please consider helping to make children’s holiday wishes come true by donating to Holiday Wish. Donations may be considered tax deductible. There are several ways to help:

• Contact Holiday Wish to fulfill a wish list for one or more young children at $50 each; Sponsor one or more older youth at $60 each.
• Make a monetary donation of any amount online at childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov.
• Send a check made payable to the FCCS Children’s Fund to Holiday Wish at 855 W. Mound Street, Columbus Ohio 43223.
• Donate any new, unwrapped toys Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. at 855 W. Mound Street or purchase a gift through Amazon.com and have it shipped to us. Holiday Wish and Black Girl Magic wish lists can be found by searching for holidaywish@fccs.us.
• Call (614) 275-2525 or email us at holidaywish@fccs.us to get started.

Gifts that fulfill wish lists must be received no later than December 10th. Additional toy donations will be accepted through December 22 at 5 p.m.
Plan for Fire Prevention and Safety

By Marion Thompson

According to the National Fire Protection Association, more than 300,000 household fires occur in the United States each year, causing property damage, injuries and loss of life. Chief causes of fires include: cooking, smoking, heating and lighting equipment. Families can avoid potential disasters in their homes by being aware of dangers and acting accordingly. Here are some fire prevention and safety tips from the American Red Cross:

Prevent and Prepare for a fire emergency:

• Install fire alarms on each level of your home. Test them each month and replace batteries at least once per year.

• Create a family fire escape plan that establishes at least two ways to escape from every room in your home, as well as how you will communicate. Teach family members to stop, drop and roll if their clothes catch on fire. Talk with children regularly about the dangers of fire and practice your plan at least twice per year.

• Practice fire safety by keeping flammable materials away from things that get hot; properly disposing of smoking materials; and not leaving fires, cooking or heating equipment, or candles unattended. Keep lighters out of reach of children.

If a fire starts:

• Get out if possible. If the house fills with smoke, crouch low and attempt to crawl under the smoke. If heat or flames block your exit, remain in a room with the door closed and a wet towel under it, until help comes. If a door is warm to the touch, do not open it. Call 911 or open a window and signal for help.

• Remain Outside. Once you’ve escaped, meet family members at a pre-determined place. Send one person to get help if necessary.

To learn more about fire safety, visit http://redcross.org.
For additional safety and parenting tips, visit childrenservices.franklincountyohio.gov.