

HONORING, UNITING, AND CELEBRATING FAMILIES

LEARNING THROUGH DOING: FROM BEING IN CARE TO WORKING WITH KIDS IN CARE

A Foster Care Alumni's Story

When I was 12, my mom was sentenced to 10 years in prison and my dad was an alcoholic. I bounced around from my friend's house to the homeless shelter to even sleeping on my sister's boyfriend's couch until entering foster care. I come from a sibling group of seven: one sibling who had the same mother and father and six stepsiblings. Being removed from my family was scary even though we were considered to be a dysfunctional family. At the time, all I knew were two things: I was going with strangers, and I would never see my family again. I entered foster care, which changed my life forever. Three years passed, and I did not visit my mom in prison once.



Then, it became my social worker's top priority for me to visit with my mom. Thereafter, I visited with her every other month. I was old enough to keep in contact with my siblings, and my social worker always encouraged me to do so. I may not have seen them as often as every day or weekly, but a simple phone call can go a long way. My younger sister finally came into care a couple of years after me. My social worker made visiting with her a priority, too. I was able to go to her foster home and do things with her on the weekends. All these years later, I have a bond with all of my siblings, each only a phone call away.

The fear I had of never seeing my family again all changed thanks to the efforts of my social worker. The impact that the system made on my life gave me the passion to want to become a social worker myself. I currently working at a child and family services agency. I work with children in care, and I can relate to them when they fear never seeing their families again. With my experience, I am able to relate to the values of my agency on the importance of keeping families connected through this difficult time. Foster care is here to keep families safe and help them move toward reunification.

I worked on a case where the children were removed for the first time and had gone 1 week without seeing their mother because she was detained due to her immigration status. The first time they visited with their mother, the tears and emotions they each expressed reminded me of when I hugged my mother for the first time in the prison after not having seen her for more than 3 years. These are the moments that remind me of why it's important for siblings to be placed

together and for parents and families to not only be aware but involved in the entire process. The process is what makes the bond after care that much stronger. Ten years later, at the age of 22, I saw my mom released from prison, and my siblings and I have a relationship with her. I give credit to my social worker and the child welfare agency for giving me the foundation to continue to grow, regardless of the tough times my family experienced.

To learn more about the intersection of child welfare and parental incarceration read *Child Welfare Practice With Families Affected by Parental Incarceration*, a bulletin for professionals offered by Child Welfare Information Gateway and available at <https://www.childwelfare.gov/pubs/parental-incarceration/>. This brief also highlights best practices for working with families affected by parental incarceration and when parents are detained or deported for immigration issues.



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