

Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast
Foster Care Alumni: Making Lived Experiences Matter Part I TRANSCRIPT

Presenters: Female Narrator; Tom Oates, Child Welfare Information Gateway; April Curtis-Rivera, Foster Care Alumni of America; Latasha Pearson, Foster Care Alumni of America; Victor Sims, Foster Care Alumni of America

[00:00:00]: [Music Introduction]

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:00:03]: This is the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast, a place for those who care about strengthening families and protecting children. You'll hear about the innovations, emerging trends and success stories across child welfare direct from those striving to make a difference. This is your place for new ideas and information to support your work to improve the lives of children, youth, and families.

TOM OATES [00:00:31]: Ensuring that those with contact or experience with the child welfare system are brought aboard to help influence child welfare policies and programs continues to be a growing trend across agencies. That plus recognizing the impact of hearing the stories of hope, trauma, resilience and pain directly from children, youth and families has state and local child welfare agencies working more with alumni of the child welfare system. But in doing so, our agencies understanding exactly how to best leverage the lived experience to provide long lasting impacts. Do we recognize the emotional toll sharing these deeply personal stories has on the current or former foster youth. Welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast, everyone. Tom Oates here, and glad you are sharing your time with us.

[00:01:23]: We are spending time in the next two episodes with members of Foster Care Alumni of America. And as it sounds, Foster Care Alumni of America is made up of alumni of foster care ranging in age who work to transform policy and practice, create greater awareness - and as you'll recognize just from the familiarity and comfort our guests have with each other - establish a strong sense of community and family. When we first started recording, we, we planned on exploring the best practices, or really the nuts and bolts of effectively incorporating lived experience into both policies and programs. And we do talk about it. However, the conversation dives deeper into topics such as strategically choosing the term 'alumni' over 'lived experience' or 'expertise' - what child welfare agencies should be looking for in alumni partners. But also, the distinction, especially for those child welfare professionals who are alumni, between being a professional caseworker or staff member and being an advocate or storyteller. The concept of always being on display has longer lasting impacts than I originally thought about. And this conversation opened my eyes a bit more.

[00:02:38]: We're joined in this Part 1 by April Curtis Rivera, co-founder of Foster Care Alumni of America and its board chair, along with Victor Sims and Latasha Pearson, both of whom served on FCAA's National Foster Care Youth and Alumni Policy Council and have or currently are working as child welfare professionals. Now, for those of you who work with or are planning on working with youth or alumni, listen particularly close to the messages around never aging out of advocacy. And the importance of alumni having boundaries about what they share, who they share with, and when they share while they're being an advocate. It was a privilege to be a fly on the wall for this conversation. You will quickly hear that this is a family, an alumni group built on shared experiences and being present for each other. Okay. Here is Part 1 of Foster Care Alumni: Making Lived Experiences Matter on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast.

[00:03:36]: April Curtis Rivera, Victor Sims, Latasha Pearson. Thank you so much for your time and welcome into the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. And you know what, April, I want to start

with, with you. And first, let's just bring the audience up to speed about FCAA. What makes Foster Care Alumni of America unique from - and there are plenty of - the other policy and advocacy and alumni groups out there?

APRIL CURTIS-RIVERA [00:04:03]: Thank you for having me and my colleagues today. The vision for Foster Care Alumni of America was developed by alumni of foster care, adults who once were in the foster care system. And I know today we talk about people who don't want to be identified as alumni, what's the right word? Do we use lived expertise, lived experience? For us at that time, back in 1999, we were really trying to take it to the next level of policy in education. Many of the leaders that were brought together across the US, they were youth advisory board members, so they were staunch advocates at their local levels, pushing policy and legislation. And then what happened was we aged out. And we were like, what's next? What, what becomes of the leaders, right? We just don't go away. And at that time, the Chafee Foster Care Independence Act came out, which really drove home the, the whole, bringing youth and young adults as well to the table. So, for us, our mission is to ensure high quality of life for those in and from foster care through the collective voice of alumni, but also through the collective voice of those who are allies.

[00:05:11]: For us, it's, it's bigger than just saying, you gotta either have an experience in a child welfare system, or you cannot sit at the table. We open up our table for those that have been reunified, that have been adopted, that have aged out, that literally have, may have had a month of experience in the child welfare system. Our table is big for all of those who have ever went to the child welfare system and we work in partnership with allies.

TOM OATES [00:05:40]: Thank you April. And that helps set the table because if we start talking about influencing and helping to shape policy, Victor and Latasha, you both have deep experience in this. You're former members of the National Foster Youth and Alumni Policy Council, which is supported both by FCAA and Foster Club and, Victor, let me start with you. What did that entail? You're providing information and input and guidance to, to stakeholders on policies and procedures. But give me a sense, Victor, what does that mean?

VICTOR SIMS [00:06:15]: It entailed the ability, the ability to be unapologetically wrong, to have those tough conversations that we all tried to like, push under the rug or swept under the rug, is what I like to say. So, I mean, human trafficking, I think was a huge conversation the first policy council meeting that I went to. And trying to get away from calling kids human traffickers or prostitutes. But like calling it by like what it, what it really is, like people trafficking. Educational stability for children in foster care. But like having the opportunity to expose the system to our own traumas is the best way I can frame it and create policies around it. It's one thing just to open our mouths and tell our story. But it's another thing to see action that goes behind the stories that are told. And that's what made, specifically the policy council very different, in my opinion was like, I felt like there were more times when I saw action happen than just a day at the Capitol where I'll just say this story and then go back home and like, well, that was great. I just, you know, became raw and, like, you know in two years, I'll come back up here and this will be the same problem that nobody is like changing or addressing.

TOM OATES [00:07:32]: That's the idea that making a difference. And your story is one thing, your story creates awareness and creates openness. Latasha, I'm curious if you've found not only the same experience that Victor did, but what was it about either who you were talking to or whatever venue you were in, or the forum that you found yourself sharing your story - why was it that you were able to make a difference, see policy changes compared to other times where you're just sharing your story?

LATASHA PEARSON [00:08:05]: Well, I definitely think that being a part of the council, as Victor said, allowed us opportunity to come together with fellow alumni. And it really allowed us to make a difference in the sense that it was a group voice. A lot of times when you're doing advocacy, whether it's at the local or state level, is kind of siloed work, like you're off with a certain group, but with the council we're able to come together as a representative of the United States, which is really awesome. And I think it made our voice more powerful and more taken a little more seriously. Just from the fact that we were a united front when we did come together and commenting on legislature, or coming up with different policies or things that were important to us as a group. So, that's why I felt I was able to make a difference simply, just because we all came together under shared experiences and valued each other and really respected each other in terms of what we brought to the table.

TOM OATES [00:09:06]: And so, there's something also about, like you mentioned, the forum that you are in. And you know, being a unified group is one thing and also at the federal level to, to have that influence. But so, you've got agencies that are thinking of something similar. They are saying we want to have that lived experience, lived expertise. We want that alumni to help influence us. But it doesn't necessarily mean going through your rolodex and looking through who is either about to age out or maybe has aged out and just calling up and saying, hey, what do you think? I want to make sure agencies understand that who they select matters. Though everybody's story has, has weight to it, but how you're going to actually make a difference. So, if we're talking about really using lived experience and getting the right people and the right experience - not only experience of their time in care, but their experience in developing policies, procedures, and in a service, the service program. So, April, let me start with you about trying to find the right type of people to provide the most impact. When looking for former foster youth and alumni to help provide their perspective, what is it that you would recommend agencies should be screening for and looking for in potential youth partners?

APRIL CURTIS-RIVERA [00:10:24]: It depends on the ask, right? So, there's different levels. One of the greatest things that I love about FCAA is that there's no age out. So, you see a lot of agencies - earlier in your question you talked about a difference in how we bring policy - you're a lifetime member of FCAA. So, you can be 50 years old and you're still bringing policy and legislation, right? We're not saying that once you hit 24, we're done working with you. Your expertise was great. Thank you for that. Keep it moving. What we're saying is you are getting like fine wine, you are aging with wisdom and you can bring back after you've done the journey of healing and bring more lens to it. If you asked me at 19 about policy, yes, I was trained and I got pulled together for the youth advisory board - but I was still going through a healing mechanism. And so, you gotta understand, you get what you ask for, right, someone who's raw and they're going to give it to you straight up and that's great. And we want to hear from those advocates because they're living that, right. They are dealing with it every day.

[00:11:28]: If you're talking about immediate changes into policy or best practices at the frontline level, work with your young people that are currently transitioning or in transition, as well as that are just fresh out of transitioning out of foster care. If you're talking about transitions that, as you reflect on older services, support services for those that have aged out or the child welfare system or have reunified or have been adopted, then you want to bring back those individuals that have had the experience, that have gone through the different, the different levels. And then, then they can bring back and say, well, this is the lens. I'm now a mother of three and I know that was like for me and I have a different perspective. My shift has the lens in which I look at policy has changed as I have changed and I have grown and I've healed and my different levels of education, as well as being a parent.

[00:12:25]: And so I would say an agency that's really important, that you are making sure that you're preparing the young people. One thing we were always, that was always important for us is that even if you're bringing in people to the table, that you are teaching them how to strategically share their story. That we're not asking people to come to the table just so that we can use them as a token to say how bad or how good was the child welfare system. We actually want to make sure that we teach them, we teach them about policy on best practices. And then as they age and they get older and they take, they want to stay in this field, you want to bring them back to the table because they also have some more tools under their belt.

TOM OATES [00:13:02]: Is there a case, then, for also when people are thinking about bringing in this experience, that they bring in the diversity of ages.

APRIL CURTIS-RIVERA [00:13:10]: Absolutely.

TOM OATES [00:13:11]: You know that the value that a 19-year-old who's going to provide of the day to day, and here's what I'm dealing with. Because somebody whose 34 may have a different lens and also probably wasn't dealing with, let's say social media, wasn't dealing with a different way of communicating, a different set of technology. So how are you providing that sort of kind of bigger picture lens? So, so I hear that the, kind of, the diversity of experience, the diversity of thought really matters.

APRIL CURTIS-RIVERA [00:13:36]: It absolutely does.

TOM OATES [00:13:38]: So, Victor, when, when agencies bring aboard, you know, be it an experience - let's just use that phrase. What should they be expecting these folks to be able to do? I mean, what are the right roles to have this experience brought to the table?

VICTOR SIMS [00:13:56]: Well, I think, I think something that April said was a 100% on point - one, you don't age out. Like, you, I don't age out of being alumni, I don't, my experience is always going to be there. And, it's a hard truth. Like, I'm only 25 at this current moment and I turn 26 this year and I have been talking to like, Cody and some of my other friends about like, oh my gosh, like aged out of like advocacy. Which is a crazy thing to like, think about. But like, everybody cuts us off at 26 years old and I been trying to back out like over the last year and a half because I'm like, I don't want it to come to a hard stop, I'd rather control it. It's probably my traumas, where I'd rather control it before it gets to me. Control the rejection, like even through the pandemic like April, April and I have actually kept contact probably more than any other year. And it's just, it may just be a quick text. It may just be like a group text with, you know, some of our other colleagues on just like, how we're doing. And it's being okay with that.

[00:14:54]: April, my first time I was 18 years old, just turned 18 when I first met April. And I automatically coined her as Auntie April. Don't know why but like coined it - now everybody's stealing it, not going to lie. But, you know, every now and then I get a little jealous. But it was that because, like I understood her wisdom, but I also understood like, her experience. So, I was like, you know what, like I relate to you because we went through the same experience, but I value you and I like, respect you because you're still here. Which is a, it's a tough thing. Because, like 26, like I could just disappear and like, not saying nobody would care, but like at this point, like it's all about like the new fresh, what's

going on? And, honestly like, repeating the same stuff like April will tell you like, yeah, we've been fighting this and that's why like, I love being called an alumni of care.

[00:15:46]: I also like being called you know, lived, lived expertise and lived experience. But the one I like, associate with most is actually the alumni because I'm like, you know what like yes, like you don't graduate the system but I've, I've made it through that system. I don't care what anybody says, like that systems like, harder than high school. And if you can call me alumni, me graduating high school, like you can definitely call me an alumni of me going through that system of care that was tough. The reason why the alumni is usually associated with something is because it's a tough experience. You know, it's tough to go through high school, it's tough to go through college. And, it's tough to go through the foster care system. Then when we're looking at like, people with experience like right now I work as a management consultant and they wanted to put me on a project and I was like, yes, I have experience with understanding permanency, but like I only understand it from an adoption lens, you know. I don't understand what it looks like when someone ages out of the system of care, when they reunify, when they end up being placed with a kinship provider. Like, yes, I had an experience in the system, but my experience is not a holistic view of what like multiple people will see in the system.

[00:16:55]: So I'm like, we need to like, like look at that and bring more people in and the team has been okay with it. I, mean, probably because I just keep repeating it like in every meeting. But, like being okay with saying like, yes, I experienced it but my experience is not, is not the only representation of the system of care. Being okay with, you know, I did get adopted - in many people's eyes, it's, it's a privilege. And I wrote an article just recently about the privilege of being adopted in the system of care. But I still went through the rejections, I still went through the no's, I still went through not knowing where I was gonna sleep or get picked up from. And, one of the things April told me the first time I met her back in 2014 was own your story and love your story. And it's something that has stuck with me even whenever I speak, you know, as a consultant, I'm always like, hey, this is me as a professional, but then this is me as someone with lived expertise. Like, this is my experience in the system. This is my experience as a professional. And like having to separate those two when I'm having conversations because if you want my experiences as a professional, it's not going to look the same as my experiences as someone who's lived through the system and Latasha and April can probably echo those sentiments as they both, like work in the system.

TOM OATES [00:18:12]: But it brings the idea of when you are bringing somebody to the table, you should be able to embrace everything that is about them. And that includes, as we're talking about, like the diversity of experience, that diversity of thought and also as alumni grow and you can, you know - anyone who's listening this, think about your high school or your college - you know, there's the collective group which has weight that goes right back to talking about what Latasha was saying when you're, you're, you're dealing with federal stakeholders and everybody had this large single, unified theme. Well, within that is the, is the pieces and parts of all of our, of all of our pathways, right, that get here. So, leveraging that as a whole. And so Latasha, we talk about using, you know, bringing somebody's whole - and it's the phrase, the whole self, and no matter where they are on their journey, be they 26 or 34 or 19. But, at that point when agencies do partner and if they're able to find the right people who can share and influence policies and programs - where should they be able to say, all right, we know what we can expect out of you, but what also should they not expect out of, out of the alumni that they partner with?

LATASHA PEARSON [00:19:33]: I think the interesting thing about when you are partnering with our alumni is because they have that dual experience, those dual experiences as well as professional for

some and alumni in care, I don't think there is a set guideline you can go by or set rules to working with them. I think you have to get to know them individually and those experiences that they come with. And so, I think that takes time. I think you just have to find young people that you're willing to take the time to develop that relationship with and as you're doing so, also be willing to invest in them in terms of helping them grow as professional and as people, ultimately. And so, for me, I don't know if I'm not sure if I answered the question necessarily, but I don't think there's a set that you can give for what you should expect because people come with so many different layers themselves, you may think you're getting one type of individual and when they come to the table, you realize they have a whole different set of skills or their experiences are totally different. So, you just have to be open minded.

APRIL CURTIS-RIVERA [00:20:49]: I would say, yeah, I agree with Latasha. The biggest thing for me is that - here's a big no, no, I will say it, Latasha, is if I am in the health and human service field, if I'm at the table and I work for your agency, it should not be automatic given that I'm going to tell my story just to move things forward for you and your organization.

LATASHA PEARSON [00:21:12]: Oh yes, agreed.

APRIL CURTIS-RIVERA [00:21:16]: So, it's not, that's not a part of my job description unless I'm a storyteller, right? So, if I'm hired as the agency storyteller, I absolutely want to tell the stories and be able to give you that input. But just as we bring in experts from the outside and pay them, right, we want to make sure that if we're using our staff in dual roles - some, many of our young people or young adults who are in this field, they don't understand the duality of the roles sometimes and they're like, they're excited. Because I went through that, I went through a period in my life, say about 20 years ago, I was excited that I got to tell my story and I was at a job that I love, but I didn't realize what it was doing. It was pulling a Band-Aid, it was ripping a Band-Aid off for me every day and I was on display at work every time I had to tell my story. Here, I thought I was educating people and I was providing the support that they needed or the education they needed to help our young people. But I was reliving my trauma with nobody to say to me, you know, do you need help and support after this? Are we, are you okay?

[00:22:16]: It was great job, April, we just got \$10,000 fundraising, \$100,000. It was, you know and so I'm very strategic when I'm working with young adults, even today in my role - I'm a Chief Strategy Officer - so I have the ability to make those decisions and say I'm not going to ask of a staff of, to relive their trauma of what I wouldn't want somebody to ask of me. Now, if we're in a situation in which they want to be able to help create, craft, draft policy best practices and support that and if they're comfortable and they've gone through the training and they have the resources after they've told their story or anything like that, that we're going to go down that path, but I'm also going to compensate them. Because what they're telling us is their expertise that we're not going to find in the books.

TOM OATES [00:23:05]: There is a point that you're talking about, about what does this, you know, what's the, again, this goes back to what Victor was talking about of the whole person, right? And, and what are we bringing you to the table for? And let's - like you would pay any expert - recognize that expertise. So, Latasha and Victor - and Latasha, let me start with you first - if we could have you kinda revisit those times when you had that seat at the table. And there's a difference, I'm gathering, from having a seat at the table versus being there when the table is created from the first part. So, I'm curious to what your experiences were in working with agencies.

LATASHA PEARSON [00:23:47]: Well, as a young person, I started at 23 and I'm 28 now, so I've kind of been removed a little bit from the work that I used to do. But when I first started out, I think my experiences was, were that of April mentioned. I was asked to share my story a lot. And, it was only once I started doing that, I realized I was being tokenized. And it was draining me, honestly, and I had to take a step back because it was taking away my love for advocacy in a way. Like, I stopped feeling that I was doing it more so for me and it became about moving forward agencies that I was working for. And they weren't asking the questions of, you know, do you want to keep sharing? It was more of I started to share and then it was kind of taken as now you have to do it regularly. And so that experiences also became a part of my experience as a professional, which I was not prepared for when I started working as a professional.

[00:24:55]: Also with agencies, because they knew my story, it made it a lot harder to just be seen as professional. Because there's times as an advocate where you want to step back from that role and you want to do your job and you want to work with young people as, just a professional. You, you love the work you do as an advocate, but that's not who you are 24'7, and so it didn't allow me to have balance with that. And I started to resent it. And so, I took like a year off where I just needed time. So, I definitely, my experiences really changed over the years from 23 to 26, well 27, because I was not, I don't think I had the right people around me. Once I left, you know, being with council or just day to day work, I think I had to learn on my own, personally, to take those steps back and to really have a balance between my work and what I chose to share. So, yeah.

TOM OATES [00:25:54]: Victor, does that ring true to you?

VICTOR SIMS [00:25:56]: Yeah. When this conversation first started, I was thinking about something April told me when I was probably like 19 or 20. I was talking about like how did this fundraiser speech for one of the organizations I actually grew up in care at and I was going to go work for them and April was very straightforward. She said be careful with that because you've already started sharing your story there, be prepared that they may continue wanting to do that even now that you've worked for them. And so, I had to be very strategic every time they would ask me after I started working for them and say, Oh, we can do it. We're going to do like a contract, a like 10-99 and I will charge you this much to do it. And they did it because that's the only person - like, agencies struggle with, like keeping up with people they serve after they no longer serve them. So, someone being in their face, it wasn't too hard to like, tell them, this is, like what we're going to do.

[00:26:54]: But April, April spent a lot of time developing me, like I will say, like she took in the aunt role as much as possible. And it helped me keep myself closed up enough to where I didn't like, always felt like I was turned on when I was at work. In the beginning, when I first had those awkward conversations about, hey, I work here now. I'm not, I'm not here just for your fundraiser, I'm not here to for an advocate. I have a degree and this degree says like, I should be able to do this and I don't want you to feel like if I don't do this, then my job is on the line. And so having those tough conversations upfront and being prepared, being okay with I may have been told no, like, we actually hired you mainly to do this and because you have your degree, we can use you as this also. Like, April was very upfront with me about that, so I was prepared. I struggled, probably the most, now at larger grand scheme of thing events when I'm working with other organizations that may be touching Foster Club or FCAA, like the community's big but small.

[00:28:04]: And so if I say something for a call here, it's assumed that I'm okay with having it with a call here and it will be brought up. And then I'm like, no, no, I was comfortable with saying this with FCAA or

Foster Youth in Action. I'm not okay with saying this with whoever that I'm in front of in that moment. And so even like because the community is so big and large, big and small, people just overshare because you've said it once, they believe it should be broadcasted everywhere. I'm very, like everyone - one of the first things, Foster Club as well as FCAA teaches us is about red light, yellow light, green light, and knowing where your levels are and when you should share. And, that's one thing that I've learned the most is this, is this a place where I should, like share. If this is a one-on-one meeting, I'm more likely to open up a little more if I've met you like once or twice before. Jerry Milner, I'm more open with Jerry Milner than I will be with the current new commissioner of the Children's Bureau because I don't really know her. And so, what I would be okay with saying with him, I may not be able to say with her. Same thing with Rafael Lopez. Like, what I might be okay to say to him may not be the same thing I'd be okay saying with Jerry Milner. And being, and being told it's okay not to have to like, that like you have to share that.

[00:29:19]: I think that was the strongest part. And so, learning that when I was 18, 19, I've always been guarded on, okay, if I'm having this conversation, what am I willing to say? And being okay with, you know, this, this may look differently than where you've seen me before. I may be more excited here. And maybe it's because there's a personal connection that I'm attached to here. Like this call right here, like, I've got three of my colleagues and friends on the call, so I'd be more like, this is an exciting call because these are my friends, these are my colleagues, these are family. And so, I'm willing to open up and share more because I know what, like, who, who everyone in this group is, to be honest. And so, I'm more willing to share just because I know if I say some that may be a lot for me to handle right in the moment, I can call April, I can call Latasha, I can call Cody and like, debrief and say, man, that was a tough moment. I have never shared that before and be okay with it.

APRIL CURTIS-RIVERA [00:30:13]: Which, which brings me to a point. Well, first off, I want to stay for the record - I don't know if Victor, Victor and then Emilie in English, in English means the guy, the kid of mine, that the boy of mine. I did not pay him to say any of the things he said today. Like, you can see every time he opens his mouth and said my name, my eyes lit up. But it really does ring true to paying homage. And that's something I do speak, when speaking with young people and young adults is being able to pay it forward. Some of the things that we don't get a chance to do, especially when we're in agencies or working with, they don't, they don't understand or continue how to connect with people. And young people leave their systems not knowing how to stay connected because they were supposed to be for them for a moment in time. With Foster Care Alumni of America or agencies, we create that forever door, right? And so being able to, to be able to say to a Victor or Latasha, I want to talk to her about motherhood, right. At 27, I stepped away from a national, from FCAA at that time, I was a first-time mom and, and I didn't care. I wanted to be able to know what it's like to be a mom without being on display. And so, the normalcy of life and what I hear from Victor and from Latasha is, what can we continue to do while still feeling normal? It is absolutely normal, whether or not you grew up in foster care, to have boundaries, to have healthy boundaries on who you share your story with. The fact that I'm hearing him say that he's processing that, we didn't normalize that for him. We didn't normalize that sense of boundaries for Latasha to feel okay to step away from child welfare and being the advocate to be able to be a mom. We have to normalize being able to be an advocate and not penalize the fact or victimize the fact that someone steps up, steps back. And so, when we're talking to agencies, is them understanding that young adults and, you know, adults my age - I, I'm still struggling with the fact that I'm 40 and I'm not considered a young adult -

VICTOR SIMS [00:32:23]: Yes, you are. Young at heart, young at heart.

TOM OATES [00:32:26]: April, April, I remember forty

VICTOR SIMS [00:32:28]: I want to get paid for that.

APRIL CURTIS-RIVERA [00:32:30]: I know you do! I know you want to get paid for that comment. He always reminds me I'm old, just so you know Tom. I'm the old auntie in the room. But what you can see from today, Tom, that we built our own structures, our own family structures, their own systems. You know, if someone asked me, how many kids do you have or how many nieces and nephews who have? Gosh, I feel like I'm the old lady in the shoe, right? I had so many kids, didn't know what to do. And that and that's because we are living and breathing that peer-to-peer support. And that is what agencies have to figure out how to basically bring together what does peer-to-peer support look like if they're going to have those with lived experience, lived expertise coming to the table more than just once. And not just in token.

TOM OATES [00:33:16]: Now, in Part 2, you'll hear the importance through their own personal stories of alumni as a peer group of family and a support system. And there are takeaways for professionals, too, in demonstrating how to show up for these advocates, how to support them. The group also shares their guidance for those youth and alumni who choose to serve as advocates or share their stories. How to manage the emotional impact and help establish boundaries. Plus, the group gives their thoughts as we work toward the future and best ways to improve and reform foster care. A reminder to subscribe to the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast on Apple podcasts, Google Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify or SoundCloud. New episodes come your way every month. If you head on over to childwelfare.gov and head to our podcast page, you'll find this episode page with links to our National Foster Care Month page, our collection of resources for youth, links to FCAA and our lists of state youth advocacy and advisory boards and foster care alumni associations so you can find your connections across the field. My thanks to April Curtis Rivera, Victor Sims, and Latasha Pearson for their time, their energy, and their willingness to share with us. Make sure you check out part two of this conversation. And of course, thanks so much to you for taking time to be part of our community here on the Child Welfare Information Gateway Podcast. I'm Tom Oates, have a great day.

FEMALE NARRATOR [00:34:45]: Thanks for joining us for this edition of the Child Welfare Information Gateway podcast. Child Welfare Information Gateway is available at childwelfare.gov and is a service of the Children's Bureau, U.S. Department of Health and Human Services Administration for Children and Families. The views and opinions expressed on this podcast do not necessarily reflect on those of Information Gateway, or the Children's Bureau.