

What Works

At Casey Family Services Foster Care 2000 conference, former foster children shared their views about what did—and what did not—help them make a successful transition.

“We need to be pushed. We need to be challenged. We need to rise to the occasion. And we have kids who help us do that.”

“Even though Casey is a good organization, sometimes foster homes and foster children aren’t always a perfect match. So there have been some bumps in the road. But I think I’m doing well.”

“As I’ve grown, I’ve realized I’ve learned a lot from my experiences and I know that I could use what I’ve learned to help people like myself. So my goal is to become a social worker.”

“I’m going to be living on my own for the very first time, which is a scary thing for me. But I’m kind of excited, too, because I want to do really good and I want to prove that I can do it on my own.”

“I feel ready and then I don’t feel ready. There are times when I’m like, “I want to be on my own. I just don’t want to deal with it anymore.” But then, like, I had a little bit of a wakeup call this summer when I got dropped from my health insurance. I always took for granted what people gave me because I just never thought about it. Now I’m thinking about it, and I’m ready, but I’m not ready.”

“I’m totally ready to get out on my own. College is a good transition between dependency and independence. When I get my degree and I start working, I’ll be able to provide for myself. So right now, financially, I’m not ready but emotionally and in my mind, I’m totally ready.”

“I was on my own for the past two years and I wasn’t ready. I put a good effort into it but I had gaps. It’s a slap in the face when you hit 18 years old and you’re out on your own. And I had a lot of trouble with it. My hope is I’ll be able to proceed on and do a little better than I have the past couple of years.”

“A lot of parents have preconceived notions of who the child is going to be and how that child will fit into their lives. And a lot of the time, there’s a friction between who the children are and who the parents want the children to be and how they want the children to fit into their lives.

“If you let go of those preconceived notions and realize that we have things that have already been instilled in us. We can learn from you, but we won’t be exactly like you and we will not fit into your life the way that you expect us to. You will find

that if you let the child be themselves the quality of your relationship will be much better.”

“I have one more suggestion: Let the little things go.”

“Being a Casey kid meant that like people were listening to me and they actually cared if you had a problem.”

“Throughout my life I wasn’t really shown too much love or appreciation and that’s what was given to me. I didn’t appreciate it and I didn’t recognize it until I went on my own. At that point, I realized how much love and care they had shown to me.”

“A lot of times you don’t realize that when children are fighting with you it’s really because they’re hurt. It’s not so much that they want to be rebellious or that you did something wrong. It’s just that people like me are very sensitive. You kind of have to let the little things go because they can become very big things. And a lot of times children are more stubborn than adults.”

“My greatest visible achievement is the fact that I got into college and that I’m on my way to reaching my goals. But I think my real greatest achievement is that I have to come to know myself and love myself and understand the circumstances surrounding my life and use them to my ability.”

“I’ve gone through a realization stage and realized that I’m the one who’s going to take care of myself from now on. I don’t have anybody else really to lean on. Casey will help me. They won’t pick me up off the ground. They’ll just give me a little push on my way while I’ll already walk.”

“I realized life is very short and you can’t really live it day by day, like I was living it. You’ve got to enjoy it day by day and proceed to work on it for the future. And that’s what I’m trying to do.”

“I think throughout my life, I’ve always been motivated. But I didn’t always have the maturity to use that motivation in constructive ways. It’s always been important for me to have a stable support network. Having a social worker for seven and a half years, being with Casey, having support of foster parents, and people in my life that could aid positively in my development really worked to my benefit.”

“I’m at the stage of my life where I need a lot of financial support and Casey’s been really helpful with that. But it’s important to me that I have someone to help me learn about adult things. Not to do things for me, but to teach me how to do those things.”

“Casey continues to work with us as long as we’re willing to work with ourselves, which is a good thing because a lot of us don’t have parents. Casey stays with you

and that's what a parent would do. Parents don't just send their kids out when they're 18 and say, "All right, that's it." They work with you. And that's what Casey does. And thanks a lot."

"When you're younger and people start talking about college and you've got to make sure you have this and that, it gets overwhelming. A lot of times people seemed disappointed if I didn't react the right way. If people had a little more understanding and did not get as disappointed, I would have been a little quicker to be on my feet."

"It's important not to give up on people just because they don't respond right away. Everyone's ready at different times for certain things and people need to understand that."

"It's important for parents to understand that it's okay to be different from the child. As they develop and as grow, you'll be able to influence who they are as people, but not necessarily force what you want them to be. You're there to aid in their development, not to take over their development."

"Foster children are different from other children because we've had other families. When you have four or five people trying to change you in little bitty ways, you end up not being the same person you started out being. I had a foster family who were good people, but very different from the way I was raised. They wanted me to be like them and I couldn't do it. It didn't work out because I thought they didn't like who I was and that's why they were trying to change me; not that they were trying to help me, which they were trying to do."

"When I was little, I was really annoying because I needed a lot of attention. Having been that child and understanding what that feels like, I can really give something to children who are just like that. That's why I'm going to be a teacher. Probably fifth or sixth grade, because that's when they're most annoying."

"I want to be a social worker so I can help children grow in the directions that they want to go in a healthy way."

"Urge children to engage in some sort of training--vocational program, college, training programs, hairdressing school--to make them valuable in the workforce because money is very important to your independence. It's not everything but without it, there's no such thing as independence."

"It is important to encourage talents because it shapes who you are. It doesn't make you a better person but it makes you feel better about yourself. If I had not had music, I would feel like I was ordinary and there's nothing worse than feeling ordinary. I've been places where I haven't been really encouraged and those were the lowest points of my life."

"I am responsible for myself but I don't necessarily know the steps of how to do all the things I'm responsible for. I still need someone to tell me how to do them. Not to do it for me but to give me instruction on how to do these things. Over time, I'll learn to do these things myself without help."

"I need someone to give me a push, start me off, and give me a little bit of know-how on how to do these adult things by myself."

"A lot of times when people are preparing to leave foster care, they're totally dependent one day and then the next day they're totally independent. There's got to be some middle ground because it just doesn't work."

"Now I do a lot of things on my own and I'm starting to appreciate everything I took for granted. But if I didn't have this before I went out on my own, I would be lost. There has to be a transition period; if there's not, then I would never make it."

"Even though the things that you're teaching the children don't look like they're soaking in, we listen. There are so many things that I learned from my foster parents. I was wrong a lot but I didn't think I was wrong then. Now I realize they were right. So don't give up."

"One of our biggest problems as teenagers is not being able to admit that you're wrong. I finally realized I was wrong and I sat there for a good couple of months hating myself thinking, 'I've ruined my life.' Then I went from self-pity to this is what I've done and don't do it again. Some people call it learning. And I finally did."

"Being a foster parent or social worker has got to be one of the most heartbreaking jobs that there is. You're working so hard to help this person and they don't want your help. Sometimes kids want your help but they just don't know how to ask for it."

"We're talking about Casey kids here. We haven't exactly had the best living arrangements our whole life. Some of us have a different view and it may be a little harder for us. A lot of us may fall on our face before we can pick ourselves back up."

"Our foster homes may change. So we depend a little bit more on Casey as an institution than the family as an institution because the family can change."

"As long as we have a support network that's stable, we're resilient, as long as we have support."

"When I was younger I was a lot angrier, but as I got older I started to see it can't be perfect. It's too much to ask any one social worker or any one agency to make that perfect for you because even regular kids don't have perfect places."

"I have had so many more opportunities being a Casey kid than regular kids, even kids with two parents. I have a hard time being angry because I've been given so much. So even if it means moving family to family, I'm a better person now than I would have been if I hadn't been a Casey kid."

"Kids are kids. And kids have been the same since the beginning of time. Foster kids are just the same. We just have a little extra baggage. Treat foster kids just like you'd treat any other kid. Just be sensitive to the issues surrounding that baggage."