

ALUMNI CELEBRATE THANKSGIVING ON CAPITOL LAWN



FCAA alumni members celebrate Thanksgiving on the steps of the United States Capitol

Members of **Foster Care Alumni of America**, alumni who spent their childhoods in foster care, celebrated Thanksgiving a day early in the shadow of the U.S. Capitol. On Wednesday, November 21, 2007, twenty-three alumni, representing 12 million alumni nationwide, gathered to draw attention to a holiday – and a time of year - often filled with disappointment for the 513,000 children currently in the nation’s foster care system.

During the dinner, held by Foster Care Alumni of America as part of our work with the national Kids Are Waiting campaign, we emphasized the need for national foster care financing reform so that foster children can be moved swiftly to safe, permanent families and other youth may avoid the need to enter foster care in the first place.

Foster care alumni came Home for Thanksgiving, because we want the government to develop more flexibility in the way it funds foster care. We want families to be reunified whenever safely possible. We want children to be kept with their siblings. We want to support extended families who step up to provide valuable stability when the nuclear family cannot meet a child’s needs.

Some foster care alumni were lucky enough to have found forever families through adoptive or foster families. Some have gone on to create our own families and traditions. Others treat Thanksgiving just like any other day. But for many former foster youth, holidays are a time of deep depression. For a frightening number of foster care alumni, holidays are spent in a jail or homeless shelter.

Amanda Dunlap, an FCAA member from Ohio, recalls “Thanksgiving is a time to spend with family and reflect on all the things you have to be grateful for. When you are in foster care, you don’t have that feeling of gratefulness. All you have is a sense of hopelessness.”

Alumni of foster care came Home for Thanksgiving to the U.S. Capitol because, after we were removed from our families, the government served as our parents. “I’m 21 now and I can’t remember a time when I was in foster care that we really celebrated Thanksgiving,” said FCAA member Eshawn Peterson of Tucson, Arizona, who spoke at the event. “I have felt so incomplete during the holiday season, especially since the people I care about most, my six sisters, were separated from me for so long.”



“Many youth who are currently in foster care and adults who were in the system find that the holidays are not a time of joy, celebration, and togetherness but rather a stark reminder of what it means not to have a family,” said Nathan Monell, Executive Director of FCAA. “They do not experience the comfort of knowing they have a place where they are always welcome year after year. They don’t get to experience family traditions.”

Traveling from states including Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Illinois, Indiana, Maryland, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina and Ohio:

- We represented the 100,000 children who wait to be adopted each Thanksgiving.
- We represented more than 513,000 children who spent Thanksgiving in foster care due to abuse or neglect.
- We represented 12 million alumni who spent too many Thanksgivings in care as children, some of whom never found permanent homes.
- We represented alumni currently serving at home or abroad in the US military.
- One chair was left vacant, in honor of children and alumni whose voices have been either silenced or deemed unimportant.



The national, nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care recognized that all children in foster care deserve a safe, nurturing, permanent family. The Pew Commission noted that current federal funding mechanisms for child welfare encourage an over-reliance on foster care at the expense of other services to keep families safely together and to move children swiftly and safely from foster care to permanent families, whether their birth families or a new adoptive family or legal guardian.

FCAA has more than 900 members representing alumni from all 50 states. The organization has partnered with Kids Are Waiting, a project of The Pew Charitable Trusts dedicated to ensuring that all children in foster care have the safe, permanent families they deserve through reform of the federal financing structure that governs our nation's foster care system. The photographs on this document were taken by Gedyon Kifle.



Foster Care Alumni of America is an independent national association of adults who experienced foster care while they were children. FCAA's mission is to provide innovation in the federal and state child welfare systems and effective and meaningful partnerships with child welfare organizations. Casey Family Programs, whose mission is to provide, improve – and ultimately prevent the need for – foster care, is proud to be the Founding Sponsor of Foster Care Alumni of America.

For more information on Foster Care Alumni of America, please:

- Visit: www.fostercarealumni.org,
- call: 888-ALUMNI-0 or 703-299-6767
- email: admin@fostercarealumni.org
- write: 118 S. Royal Street, 2nd Floor, Alexandria, VA 22314

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