

## Custody Relinquishment - What do you need to know?

***Some parents are faced with a very difficult decision, they must choose to either keep their children at home without the means to give them the mental health and supportive services that they need or have their child placed in the child welfare and or juvenile justice systems to obtain mental health services.<sup>1</sup>***

***For youth placed in the child welfare system 52% will reunify with their caregivers, 20% will be adopted, and 10% will emancipate or age out of foster care.<sup>2</sup>***

***More than 1/3 of homes seeking to adopt a youth with special needs back out because of their prospective child's emotional, mental or behavioral problems.<sup>3</sup>***

***Of youth who age out or emancipate from the foster care system, 11% are incarcerated within two years and only 11% graduate from high school. <sup>4</sup>***

***Research on youth who emancipate from foster care suggests a nexus between foster care involvement and later episodes of homelessness<sup>5</sup>***

***The majority (80%) of youth in foster care have developmental, emotional, or behavioral problems<sup>6</sup> and yet, of this majority, less than 1/3 receive mental health services. <sup>7</sup>***

**Bottom line, placing a child or youth in the foster care system for mental health services can create more risk than it does supports. We should never ask parents to make such a decision.**

*"I believe that if my adoptive parents and I had better supports in our home, I could have stayed there. Instead I was moved around and wound up homeless when I was 18 and still in high school." – Eric Tennessee, Foster Care alumni (age 26)*

### ***Make a Change Today:***

- Educate your legislators, and policy/local decision makers to support policies that keep families together
- Reach out and develop supportive, caring relationships with youth and their families
- Engage children and youth in community activities and services before they enter foster care

1 United States General Accounting Office. Child Welfare and Juvenile Justice Federal Agencies Could Play a Stronger Role in Helping States Reduce the Number of Children Placed Solely to Obtain Mental Health Services. Washington D.C.: United States General Accounting Office, 2003.

2 [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats\\_research/afcars/tar/report16.htm](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/stats_research/afcars/tar/report16.htm).3/16/2011

3 [http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/barriers/family\\_3.htm#barriers](http://www.acf.hhs.gov/programs/cb/pubs/barriers/family_3.htm#barriers) 3/30/10

4 Time for Reform: Aging Out and On Their Own. (2007). Kids are Waiting Fix foster Care Now. The Pew Charitable Trusts.

5 Fernandes, A. L. (2007). Runaway and Homeless Youth:Demographics, Programs, and Emerging Issues. Washington D.C.: Congressional Research Service.

6 <http://www.cwla.org/programs/bhd/mhfacts.htm> 3/30/09

7 Austin, Lisette. (2004) Mental Health Needs of Youth in Foster Care: Challenges and Strategies. The Connection, 20(4).