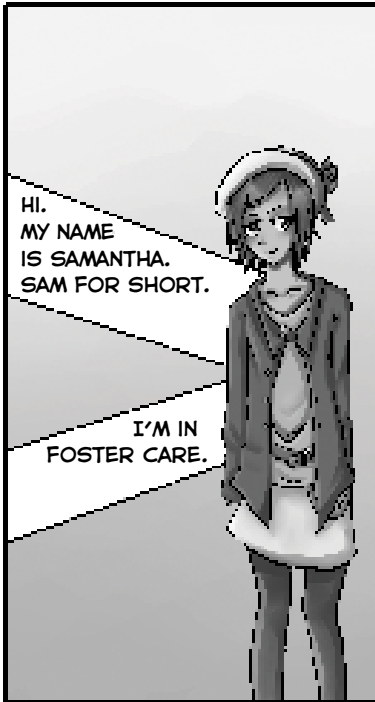


WHAT HAPPENS WHEN YOU LEAVE YOUR HOME.

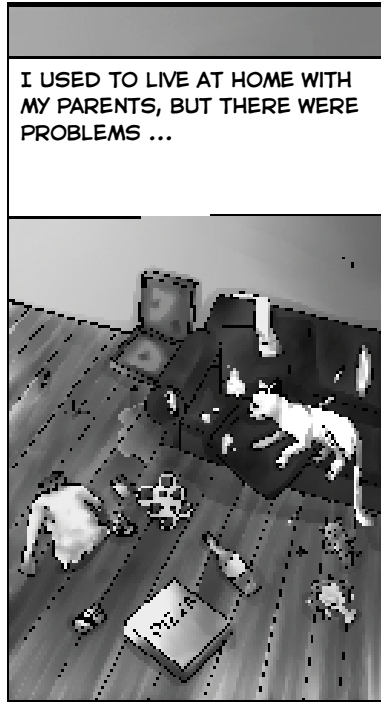
*A Survivor's Guide to the Foster Care System
for Kids in Nevada*





HI.
MY NAME
IS SAMANTHA.
SAM FOR SHORT.

I'M IN
FOSTER CARE.



I USED TO LIVE AT HOME WITH
MY PARENTS, BUT THERE WERE
PROBLEMS ...



NOW I LIVE WITH A FOSTER CARE
FAMILY. IT'S DIFFERENT FROM MY
HOUSE, BUT I KNOW I AM SAFE HERE.
I MISS MY PARENTS AND MY HOUSE,
AND I HOPE TO GO BACK HOME
SOMEDAY.

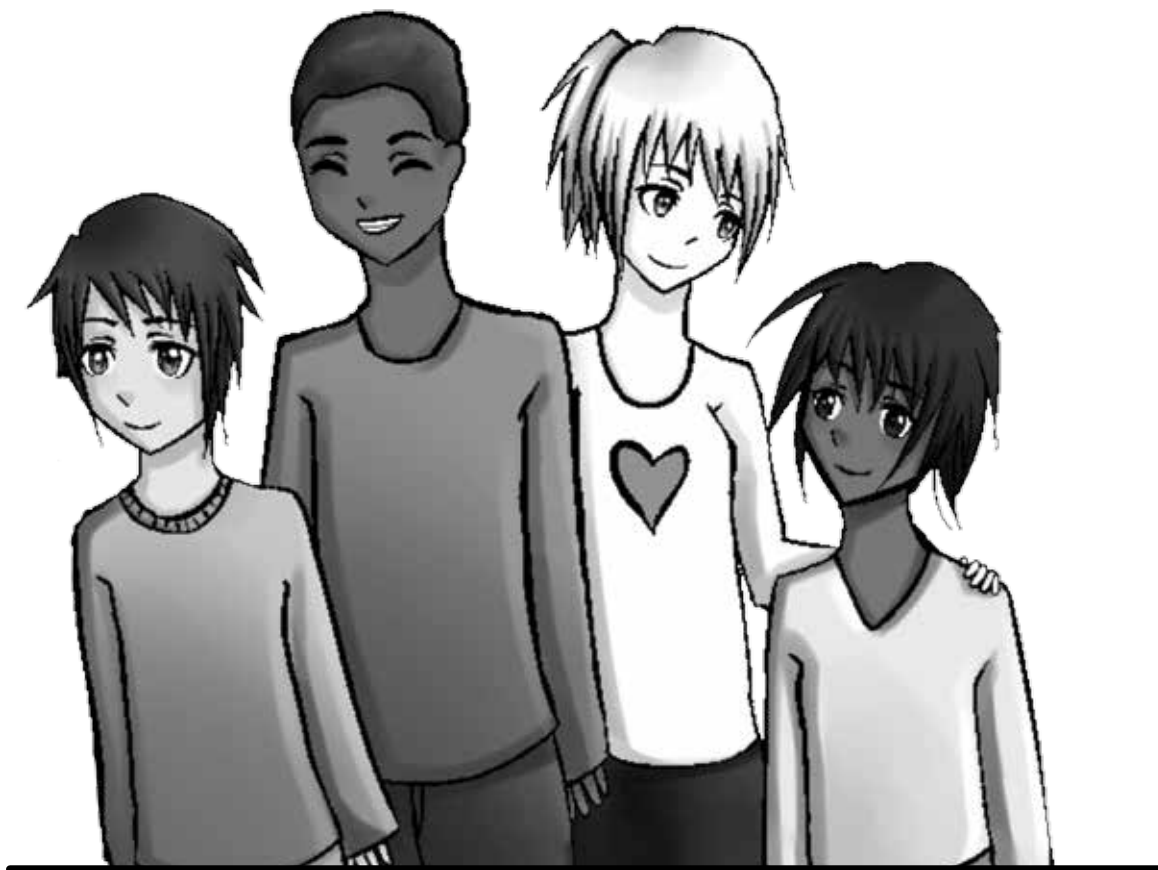
IN THIS BOOK, MY FRIENDS AND I WILL TELL YOU ABOUT BEING IN FOSTER CARE. WE WILL HAVE DIFFERENT STORIES, BUT WE ARE KIDS LIKE YOU, AND WE ALL WANT ANSWERS.


girl scouts
of southern nevada

THE STAFF OF LEGAL AID CENTER OF SOUTHERN NEVADA WISHES TO EXTEND ITS SINCERE THANKS TO THE TWO YOUNG VOLUNTEERS WHO MADE THIS BOOK POSSIBLE. LAUREN NELSON DONATED HER TALENT FOR GRAPHIC DESIGN AND SABINA MANZINI DONATED HER TALENT FOR RESEARCH AND NARRATIVE WRITING. LAUREN AND SABINA ARE MEMBERS OF GIRL SCOUTS OF THE USA AND THEY EARNED THE ORGANIZATION'S COVETED "GOLD AWARD" FOR THEIR WORK ON THIS PROJECT. BECAUSE OF THEIR DEDICATION, THIS VITAL INFORMATION WILL BE MORE ACCESSIBLE TO THE THOUSANDS OF CHILDREN WHO PASS THROUGH THE CLARK COUNTY FOSTER CARE SYSTEM EACH YEAR.

THANK YOU TO THE R&R PARTNERS FOUNDATION FOR THEIR ASSISTANCE IN BRINGING THIS PROJECT TO LIFE.

HI, I'M JESSE, AND I'M THE ONE WITH THE HEART ON MY SHIRT. THESE ARE MY FRIENDS, AND WE ARE ALL IN FOSTER CARE TOGETHER. ONE THING THAT SURPRISED US WAS HOW MANY DIFFERENT PEOPLE SUDDENLY CAME INTO OUR LIVES WHEN WE WENT INTO FOSTER CARE.



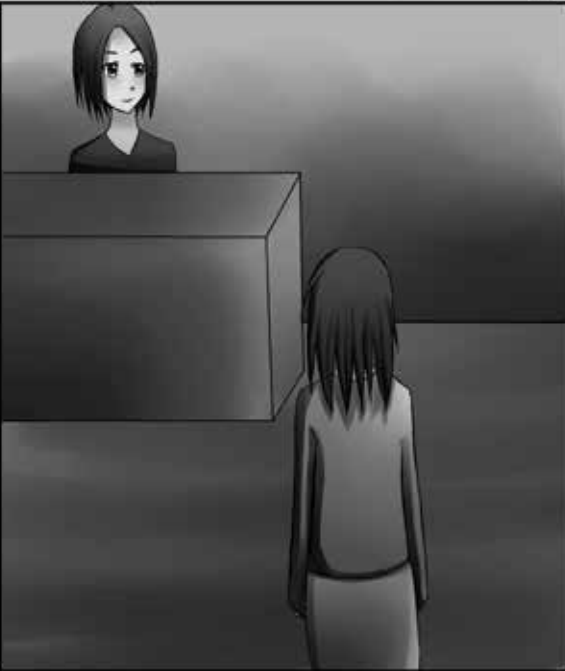
THERE WAS A WORKER WHO CHECKED TO SEE IF OUR HOUSES WERE SAFE. SHE WAS WORRIED THAT OUR PARENTS WERE NOT KEEPING US SAFE, SO SHE TOOK US TO LIVE AT A SAFE HOUSE WHILE OUR PARENTS GOT THINGS TOGETHER AT HOME.

NOW THERE IS ANOTHER WORKER. HE IS CALLED OUR "CASEWORKER," AND HIS JOB IS TO HELP OUR PARENTS GET THE CLASSES THEY NEED TO MAKE OUR HOMES SAFE AGAIN. BUT THAT'S JUST THE BEGINNING ...

I MET A COUNSELOR WHO HELPED ME TALK ABOUT MY FEELINGS BECAUSE I WAS UPSET.



THEN I MET THE JUDGE, THE PERSON WHO WILL MAKE THE FINAL DECISION ON WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME AND MY FAMILY.



THE PEOPLE I WANTED TO SEE MOST WERE MY PARENTS, BUT THEY HAD TO STRAIGHTEN UP AND DO WHAT THE JUDGE SAID BEFORE I COULD GO HOME.

IT'S HARD TO KEEP ALL THE PEOPLE STRAIGHT. I LOOK BACK AND REALIZE THE ONE WHO WAS THERE THE WHOLE TIME WAS MY LAWYER.



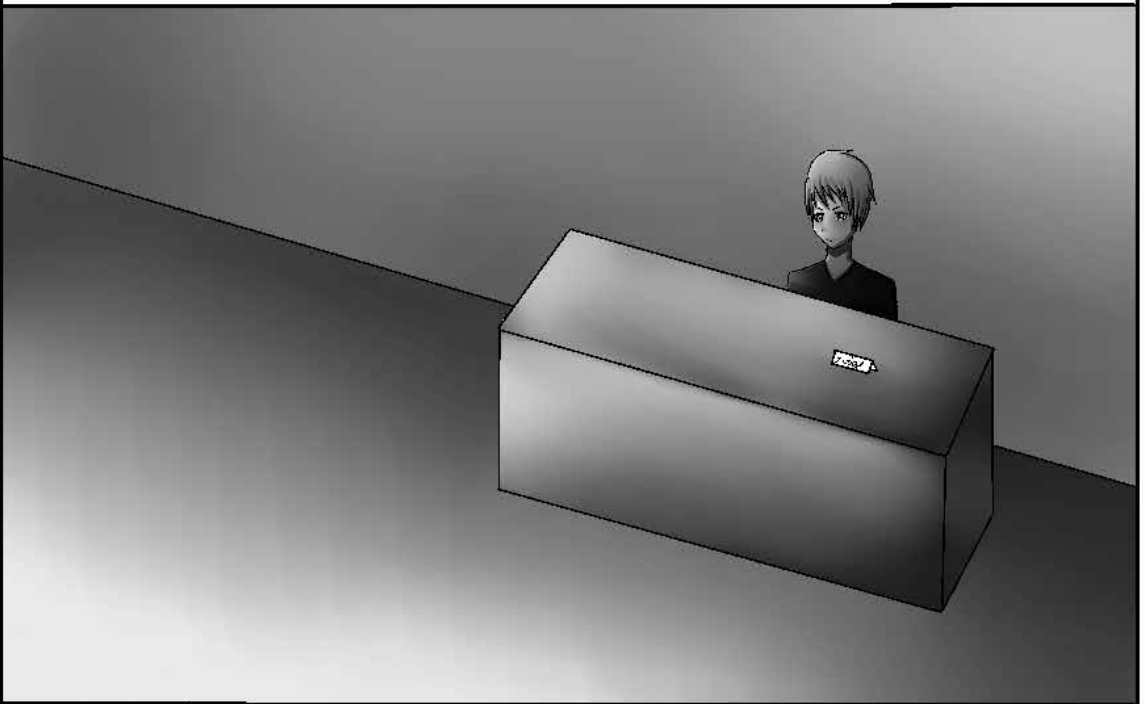


YOUR LAWYER IS THE ONE PERSON WHO WILL FIGHT FOR YOU UNTIL YOU GET A PERMANENT SOLUTION. EVEN IF YOUR FOSTER CARE FAMILY OR YOUR CASE-WORKER CHANGES, YOUR LAWYER ALMOST ALWAYS STAYS THE SAME.



YOUR LAWYER ALWAYS KEEPS YOUR SECRETS.

YOUR LAWYER WILL ALWAYS TELL YOU THE TRUTH ABOUT WHAT'S GOING ON.



HE OR SHE WILL ALSO TELL THE JUDGE WHAT YOU WANT.

I'M ANA AND I'M IN FOSTER CARE WITH MY SISTER. WE'RE LIVING WITH MY AUNT AND COUSINS AS OUR FOSTER FAMILY.



THE MOST IMPORTANT THING I'VE LEARNED IN FOSTER CARE IS TO SPEAK UP!

MY FIRST FOSTER FAMILY DIDN'T WORK OUT FOR US. MY SISTER WAS SUPER LITTLE AND WE GOT SEPARATED INTO TWO FOSTER HOMES, BUT WE REALLY WANTED TO BE TOGETHER. I MISSED HER SO MUCH. I WOULD CRY AT NIGHT, MISSING MY SISTER, MISSING MY PARENTS.

MY LAWYER ASKED ME IF WE HAVE SOME OTHER FAMILY OR FRIENDS I WANT TO STAY WITH INSTEAD. I GAVE HIM A LIST OF RELATIVES AND FRIENDS WHERE WE MIGHT GO. I LIKE THAT HE ASKED ME FOR IDEAS.

THE NEXT PROBLEM WAS I BROKE MY GLASSES. I NEEDED GLASSES FOR SCHOOL. I TOLD MY LAWYER, WHO TALKED TO THE JUDGE. AGAIN, PROBLEM SOLVED, AND I GOT NEW GLASSES!

IF YOU FEEL LIKE NO ONE IS LISTENING TO YOU, ASK FOR A LAWYER. ASK YOUR CASEWORKER, YOUR FOSTER PARENTS, THE JUDGE OR ANYONE INVOLVED IN YOUR CASE TO HELP YOU, OR YOU CAN CALL 386-1070. PRESS "0" TO BE CONNECTED TO THE OPERATOR AND ASK TO BE CONNECTED TO CAP.

I'M KEESHA AND I'M IN FOSTER CARE. I'M GOING TO SEE THE JUDGE NEXT WEEK. I'M GOING TO TELL HIM WHAT HAPPENED TO ME. I'M GOING TO TELL HIM THAT I DON'T WANT TO GO HOME. I WILL TELL HIM WHAT I WANT TO HAPPEN TO ME NEXT INSTEAD.

MY LAWYER WILL BE WITH ME IN COURT WHEN I DO. MY LAWYER WILL MAKE SURE THE JUDGE UNDERSTANDS EXACTLY WHAT I WANT TO HAPPEN.

YESTERDAY I WENT TO KIDS' COURT TO LEARN ABOUT HOW COURT WORKS. I HAVE TO "TESTIFY" OR SPEAK IN COURT. I'M GOING TO TELL THE JUDGE HOW MY STEPDAD HURT ME. I'M NERVOUS, BUT I KNOW WHAT TO EXPECT SINCE I WENT TO KIDS' COURT ALREADY AND I PRACTICED.



I NEVER KNEW MY REAL DAD. MY MOM REMARRIED, BUT THEN SHE DIED WHEN I WAS LITTLE. I WAS LIVING WITH MY STEPDAD. IT WAS BAD FOR ME AT HOME. I DON'T WANT TO LIVE WITH MY STEPDAD ANYMORE BECAUSE I DON'T TRUST HIM. I TOLD MY LAWYER EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENED TO ME SO THE JUDGE CAN KNOW ABOUT MY STEPDAD. MY LAWYER SAYS THAT THE JUDGE WILL LISTEN AND THAT HE OR SHE MAKES THE FINAL DECISION.

WHAT I WANT TO DO IS STAY WITH MY FOSTER FAMILY. I WANT THEM TO ADOPT ME. THEY SAID THEY WOULD BE WILLING, AND I WOULD BE SO HAPPY IF THAT COULD HAPPEN. I'M HOPING THE JUDGE WILL SAY YES.



I'M DIEGO AND I'M IN FOSTER CARE. YOU SHOULD KNOW THAT THERE IS AN IMPORTANT NEW LAW IN NEVADA. IT'S A BILL OF RIGHTS FOR KIDS IN FOSTER CARE.

THIS IS A BIG DEAL BECAUSE IT'S A LAW THAT SAYS THINGS LIKE FOSTER KIDS HAVE A RIGHT TO TALK TO THEIR LAWYER.



CALL LEGAL AID CENTER - PHONE # 702-386-1070

THE LAW SAYS THAT IF WE HAVE BROTHERS OR SISTERS, WE HAVE A RIGHT TO LIVE TOGETHER UNLESS THERE IS A **VERY** GOOD REASON WHY NOT.

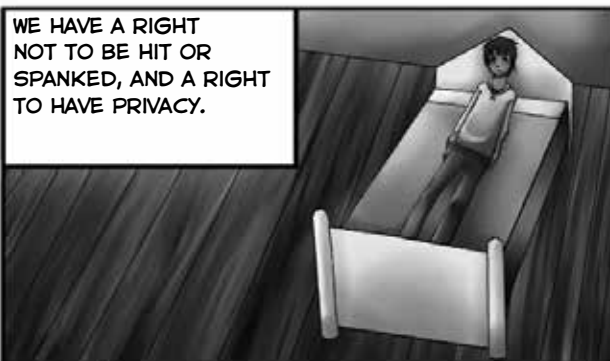


WE HAVE A RIGHT TO GO TO OUR OWN CHURCH, TEMPLE OR MOSQUE - OR NONE AT ALL.



NO ONE SHOULD TRY TO CHANGE OUR BELIEFS.

WE HAVE A RIGHT NOT TO BE HIT OR SPANKED, AND A RIGHT TO HAVE PRIVACY.



WE HAVE A RIGHT TO BE TREATED WITH RESPECT AND DIGNITY.

THIS LAW HELPS US ALL.



EVERY KID IN FOSTER CARE SHOULD KNOW ABOUT IT.

IT'S ME, SAM, AGAIN. WHEN YOU GO INTO FOSTER CARE, LOTS OF THINGS CHANGE.

I'VE BEEN IN THREE FOSTER HOMES SO FAR, SO ... LOTS OF CHANGES FOR ME. I'VE LEARNED TO ASK QUESTIONS WHEN I ARRIVE, SO I KNOW I AM DOING THE RIGHT THING.



SOME FAMILIES ARE ALL ABOUT HOMEWORK, BEDTIMES AND CLEAN ROOMS.

IF YOU HAVE PROBLEMS WITH YOUR FOSTER FAMILY, TALK TO THEM ABOUT IT. TALKING IS IMPORTANT.

IF TALKING TO YOUR FOSTER FAMILY DOESN'T SOLVE THE PROBLEM, TALK TO YOUR LAWYER OR CASEWORKER. THE FOSTER FAMILY CAN CHANGE, BUT YOUR LAWYER WILL STAND BESIDE YOU ALL THE WAY.

I'M JEREMIAH AND I'M IN FOSTER CARE WITH MY GRANDPARENTS NOW.

I WANT TO KNOW WHAT WILL HAPPEN TO ME. I KEEP ASKING MY LAWYER FOR UPDATES, AND IT LOOKS LIKE I'M NOT EVER GOING TO GO HOME WITH MY PARENTS AGAIN. BOTH MY PARENTS HAVE DRUG PROBLEMS. SO FAR THEY ARE NOT GETTING BETTER. ...

MY LAWYER SAYS THAT THERE ARE THREE OPTIONS FOR KIDS MY AGE.

- 1) I COULD GO HOME IF MY PARENTS GET BETTER.
- 2) I COULD GET A GUARDIAN.
A GUARDIAN IS SOMEONE WHO THE JUDGE APPOINTS TO TAKE CARE OF YOU UNTIL YOU ARE 18. A GUARDIAN IS USUALLY A FAMILY MEMBER LIKE AN OLDER BROTHER OR SISTER, AN AUNT/UNCLE, OR MAYBE MY GRANDPARENTS!
- 3) I COULD GET ADOPTED.
WHEN YOU ARE ADOPTED, YOU BECOME PART OF A NEW FAMILY, FOREVER AND EVER.

MY FIRST CHOICE IS TO GO HOME. BUT, IF MY PARENTS CAN'T STOP THE DRUGS, THEN MY CHOICE WOULD BE TO HAVE MY GRANDPARENTS ADOPT ME. I'LL TELL MY LAWYER THAT. I'LL TELL THE JUDGE TOO.



IT'S ME AGAIN, SAM, AND I HAVE A LOT OF UPDATES TO SHARE WITH YOU.

THE JUDGE AND MY MOM CREATED A CASE PLAN A WHILE AGO, WHICH IS A LIST OF THINGS MY MOM HAS TO DO SO I CAN GO BACK HOME.

SHE WASN'T STICKING TO THE PLAN FOR A WHILE AND SHE FAILED SOME OF HER DRUG TESTS. ...

IT'S BEEN A STRUGGLE FOR HER, BUT NOW SHE'S BEEN PASSING THE TESTS AND SHE HAS BEEN OFF DRUGS FOR SEVERAL WEEKS! SHE'S STICKING TO THE CASE PLAN AND ATTENDING CLASSES AS WELL. I'M SO HAPPY THAT SOON SHE WILL BE ABLE TO TAKE CARE OF ME AND MY BROTHERS!



HI, I'M KAYLEE AND I'M IN FOSTER CARE. MY STORY IS PERSONAL AND I DON'T LIKE TO TELL IT.

WHEN I WAS AT HOME, MY MOM'S BOYFRIEND WOULD SOMETIMES TOUCH ME. IT WAS ALWAYS ICKY WHEN HE WAS AROUND. I HATED FOR HIM TO TOUCH ME. I TOLD MY MOM, BUT AT FIRST SHE DIDN'T BELIEVE ME.

ONE DAY, WHEN IT WAS JUST ME AND MY MOM'S BOYFRIEND AT HOME, HE TRIED TO KISS ME. I PUSHED HIM AWAY. HE SAID HE WOULD HURT ME IF I TOLD ANYONE. I RAN OUTSIDE CRYING.

HE LAUGHED AT ME. I WAS FRIGHTENED, BUT I DIDN'T WANT IT TO HAPPEN AGAIN.

I TOLD MY STORY TO A TEACHER AT SCHOOL. SHE HELPED GET ME SAFE.

NOW MY MOM BELIEVES ME. MOM GOT RID OF HER BAD BOYFRIEND. I'M SO GLAD MY MOM IS ON MY SIDE. I LOVE MY MOM SO MUCH AND SHE LOVES ME TOO.

TODAY, I HAVE MY MOM AND I HAVE A LAWYER.

THEY BOTH SAY THAT ANYTIME SOMEONE TOUCHES YOU AND YOU DON'T LIKE IT, THEN IT IS WRONG.

YOUR BODY BELONGS TO YOU ALONE.

SAM AGAIN – AND I HAVE GOOD NEWS! MY BROTHERS AND I ARE GOING WITH OUR MOM!

MOM MET WITH THE JUDGE, WHO SAID SHE HAD DONE EVERYTHING SHE NEEDED TO DO! I'M PICKING UP MY THINGS FROM MY FOSTER CARE FAMILY, SAYING THANK YOU TO THEM FOR TAKING CARE OF US, AND THEN I'M GOING HOME!

I COULD NOT HAVE GONE THROUGH THIS WITHOUT MY LAWYER.



IT'S ALL I EVER WANTED. REALLY.

NEVADA'S FOSTER CHILD BILL OF RIGHTS

KIDS WHO ARE IN FOSTER CARE HAVE RIGHTS. THESE RIGHTS ARE WRITTEN IN THE LAW. RIGHTS ARE KIND OF LIKE RULES ABOUT HOW FOSTER KIDS NEED TO BE TREATED WHILE THEY ARE IN FOSTER CARE. HERE ARE YOUR RIGHTS:

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO LIVE:

- IN A HOME WHERE YOU CAN FEEL SAFE AND HAPPY;
- WHERE YOU FEEL THAT YOUR FOSTER FAMILY LIKES YOU;
- WHERE YOU HAVE ENOUGH CLOTHES AND WARM CLOTHES FOR WINTER;
- WHERE YOU GET ENOUGH FOOD TO EAT AND THE FOOD IS GOOD FOR YOU.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO BE:

- IN A FOSTER HOME WITH YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS IF IT IS OK WITH THE JUDGE;
- ABLE TO STAY WITH A MEMBER OF YOUR FAMILY LIKE A GRANDMOTHER, GRANDFATHER, AUNT, UNCLE OR OTHER FAMILY MEMBER (IF THEY ARE APPROVED BY THE FOSTER CARE WORKERS) OR, WHEN THE JUDGE THINKS IT IS SAFE TO STAY IN YOUR OWN HOME.

YOU HAVE THE RIGHT TO:

- HAVE YOUR FOSTER MOM AND DAD BE POLITE AND NICE TO YOU, EVEN WHEN THEY ARE MAD OR UPSET;
- WRITE LETTERS AND SEND THEM IN THE MAIL AND TO OPEN LETTERS YOU GET IN THE MAIL;
- NOT BE SPANKED OR HIT;
- NOT BE LOCKED IN A ROOM OR BE LEFT ALONE FOR A LONG TIME;
- NOT HAVE ANYONE GO THROUGH YOUR STUFF UNLESS YOU SAY IT'S OK;
- GO, OR NOT GO, TO CHURCH, TEMPLE OR OTHER HOUSE OF GOD OR FAITH;
- KEEP YOUR OWN MONEY;
- PLAY WITH OTHER CHILDREN AND DO THINGS THAT ARE FUN IN PLACES OTHER THAN AT YOUR FOSTER HOME;
- TO SEE AND TO TALK TO YOUR CASEWORKER OR OTHER ADULTS WHO ARE HELPING YOU IN FOSTER CARE AT LEAST ONCE A MONTH AND TALK TO THEM ALONE IF YOU WANT;
- HAVE THE JUDGE OR YOUR CASEWORKER TELL YOU WHAT IS GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT FOR YOU AND YOUR FAMILY AND TO HAVE THEM LISTEN TO YOU WHEN YOU TELL THEM WHAT YOU THINK ABOUT IT;

- HAVE YOUR CASEWORKER TELL YOU BEFORE YOU HAVE TO MOVE TO A DIFFERENT FOSTER HOME OR WHEN SOMETHING ELSE IS GOING TO CHANGE;
- HAVE SOMEONE KEEP A PICTURE AND OTHER INFORMATION ABOUT YOU, SO IT CAN HELP THEM FIND YOU IF YOU GET LOST;
- WHEN YOU ARE 15 YEARS OLD OR OLDER, TO LEARN HOW TO TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF LIKE AN ADULT.

YOU HAVE FAMILY RIGHTS TOO!

- IF THE JUDGE SAYS IT'S OK, YOU CAN HAVE VISITS WITH YOUR FAMILY.

YOU HAVE MEDICAL AND HEALTH RIGHTS:

- TO SEE A DOCTOR TO MAKE SURE YOU ARE OK AND THAT YOU STAY HEALTHY;
- TO NOT TAKE MEDICINE THAT MAKES YOU FEEL BAD.

YOU HAVE SCHOOL RIGHTS. YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO:

- GO TO SCHOOL OR PRESCHOOL WHEN YOU ARE OLD ENOUGH;
- GO TO YOUR SAME SCHOOL IF POSSIBLE;
- HAVE YOUR OLD SCHOOL GIVE YOUR NEW SCHOOL YOUR EDUCATION RECORDS;
- KEEP DOING AFTER-SCHOOL ACTIVITIES OR SPORTS LIKE YOU DID BEFORE YOU WERE IN FOSTER CARE;
- HAVE SOMEONE HELP YOU WHEN YOUR SCHOOLWORK IS TOO HARD;
- TRUST THAT NO ADULTS AT SCHOOL WILL TELL ANYONE THAT YOU ARE IN FOSTER CARE;
- RECEIVE ASSISTANCE, WHILE YOU ARE IN HIGH SCHOOL, TO HELP YOU FIND OUT HOW YOU CAN GO TO COLLEGE.

IF YOU ASK YOUR FOSTER MOM OR DAD, THEY CAN TELL YOU WHEN IT WILL BE A GOOD TIME FOR YOU TO CARRY OUT THESE RIGHTS. IF NO ONE FOLLOWS THESE RIGHTS, TELL SOMEONE AND YOU WON'T GET IN TROUBLE FOR TELLING. YOU CAN TELL:

- YOUR CASEWORKER
- YOUR GUARDIAN AD LITEM OR CASA
- YOUR ATTORNEY
- YOUR FOSTER MOM OR FOSTER DAD
- AN ADULT THAT HELPS YOUR FOSTER MOM OR DAD TAKE CARE OF YOU IN YOUR FOSTER HOME
- THE JUDGE



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