

February 18, 2020: Developing Appropriate Transitioning for our Youth (Reunification, Modification of Placement, Separation of Siblings, etc.) and Quality Parenting Initiative (QPI)

Panel: Trudy Petkovich, Yani Sanchez, and Demarco -- a former foster youth who aged out of the dependency system

Yani Sanchez (ysanchez@citrusfcn.com) is a **foster-parent liaison**. She supports foster parents in the QPI process and is in drug court with Judge Cohen. Yani also serves as a mentor for foster parents.

Trudy Petkovich's job with **Citrus** (ptrudy@citrusfcn.com) is to support getting children into the right homes and placements. She is involved in the development of transition planning and the QPI relaunch.

Demarco is currently in the MBA program at FIU and aged out of the foster-care system. He is also on the Youth Advisory Council. Demarco, a former foster youth, was an inspiration to all of us and reminded us how important it is for children in the system to have a GAL who is a voice for them and has "an ear to listen," while advocating for their best interest

Trudy and Yani—you gave us an opportunity to participate in the process of creating meaningful transition plans and the issues which we feel need to be addressed. We also have a much better understanding of the relaunch of QPI.

- **QPI (Quality Parenting Initiative)** is an approach to strengthening foster care -- including kinship care -- by refocusing on quality parenting for all children in the child welfare system.
- It takes EVERYONE in the system and makes them a parent for the child.
- QPI begins when the child enters the system until they transition to permanency.
- The case manager determines if it is safe to initiate a comfort call between the foster parent and biological parent. This is just a conversation to begin a relationship. It can be as simple as favorite foods, bedtime routine, etc.
- Within 2 weeks of placement, an assessment is completed by the case manager of the birth family to determine safety. If all is okay, an ice breaker is arranged. This is between the foster parent, biological parent, case manager, and a Citrus champion (support person) to discuss the child.
- The ice breaker is the beginning of co-parenting. It is the start of the relationship and can even continue after reunification.
- Many foster parents are reluctant to co-parent -- but if it is determined to be safe, "NO" is not an acceptable answer and can result in moving the child to another placement.
- The co-parenting plan is reexamined every 2 months.
- The best interest of the child is at the center of the plan.

- Children deserve foster parents and caregivers who convey love and acceptance and who strive to co-parent with and demonstrate support of birth parent's efforts to be successful.
- **Transitions:** many different types -- reunification, modification of placement, separation of siblings, change of schools, etc.
- **Issues raised when developing transition plans:**
 - o When a child is moved to a relative/non-relative caregiver or reunified with a parent, there is a court hearing and GAL is notified. HOWEVER, when there is a modification of placement from licensed home to licensed home it does not go before the judge, and too often GAL is not notified. Sometimes the GAL finds out when they do their home visit and the child no longer lives there.
 - o When children are separated, there is no transition plan and oftentimes no sibling visitation. This is especially true when there are multiple siblings in multiple placements.
 - o When children are moved from one foster home to another, they are not always kept in their home school. IEPs need to be followed if in a new school.
 - o When a child has been moved from a foster home to another placement, there needs to be a transition process if the child is bonded to the prior foster parent.
 - o When the chances of reunification are minimal, a child should be placed in a foster home where the foster parents are willing/able to adopt should the child become available for adoption. This would minimize the number of times we change placement and reduce the trauma for the child if they have been in that placement for a while and bonded with the foster parents.
- Every change of placement should have a transition plan -- ask for it or for a transition staffing. How long the child has been in their placement should be a consideration.
- **USE YOUR VOICE.** Ask for those things that are important to be included.
- Demarco came to the US with his mom who passed away from breast cancer. He was living with an Aunt who was no longer able to care for him, and he became homeless and was an undocumented immigrant. He discussed how foster care saved his life and also spoke about the bad experiences he had while in the system. For him, education is the most important focus. **IF THERE IS A PROBLEM IN SCHOOL, THERE IS A PROBLEM!!!**
- **Make sure to check if a child has an IEP,** if it is being followed, and be certain you advocate to get IEPs for those who need it. All transition plans must include educational plans.