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Sent: Wednesday, December 25, 2013 12:06 PM
To: scott.corcoran@afamilyforeverychild.org
Subject: AFFEC Family Finding December 2013



A Family For Every Child

December 2013

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Family Finding is a program that discovers and connects youth in foster care with relatives and other loving connections in order to provide support, connections, and even placement. Studies show that families are more likely to provide permanency for children in foster care, and help them become successful adults. Furthermore, children connected with their relatives report less feelings of loneliness, and greater feelings of love and self worth.

The holidays can be a particularly difficult time for children in foster care. While many kids are spending the holidays with extended family, some foster youth find themselves in an unfamiliar home with new people and traditions. Many older foster teens have lost touch with their family members and other connections, which makes the holiday season even more difficult. Due to programs like Family Finding, many foster youth are able to reconnect with estranged loved ones, which is often the best holiday gift of all.

Family Finding Success Story: Phillip*

Phillip was born to a low-functioning mother and does not have a legal father. His history of abuse started when he was an infant, at the hands of his mother and step-father. Some of his family stepped in to care for him at that time. However, they lost touch with him for about a decade when he was placed in foster care. Phillip had twenty-two placements in a span of ten years. He does not have any siblings and has faced many of these transitions alone.

During the discovery process of mining case files, twenty-two connections to Phillip were identified and called. Volunteers were able to contact thirteen people in Phillip's life from searching the internet and engaging with discovered family. From those connections, five people participated in the Family Meeting. In the Family Meeting they planned for Phillip's future and discussed how to meet his needs for emotional and physical permanence. They decided that to begin with they would send photos and letters to Phillip to introduce themselves. Participating family

members also received photos of Phillip to see how he has grown and what he looks like now. After some time of getting reacquainted, Phillip wrote letters back to family and eventually started visiting with them. The decisions made and actions taken have undergone evaluation and follow-up to ensure that Phillip's needs are being met. A Family For Every Child also continues to follow-up with supportive individuals to see how contact is going and to offer support.

As a result of A Family For Every Child's Family Finding Program, Phillip has reconnected with family that has been concerned about him for the last ten years. He receives letters from his family members and greatly enjoys reading them and looking at family pictures. He remembers everyone that he has reconnected with. Phillip is now talking about going to college, which is a completely new subject for him. After receiving letters from family, Phillip continues to have questions about his family as he gains a sense of his identity and where he comes from. Phillip started visiting his family over the holidays and writes letters back to his relatives. He says he finally feels like he belongs, and he is excited to be spending this Christmas with his aunts, uncles, grandmother, and cousins.

*Name has been changed

What Oregon Should do for Foster Children: Guest Opinion

From [Oregon Live](#), December 16

By Pamela Butler and Derenda Schubert, Ph.D.

At 60, Jackie Lynn never thought she'd be raising young children again. But when her brother's grandchildren were taken into Oregon foster care four years ago, she left her home in Washington for Oregon and soon became the permanent, legal parent to 11-year-old "Little Jackie," 14-month-old Brodie, and, later, 1-year-old Joey.

Angry, acting out, and already nearly a teenager, Little Jackie might have otherwise ended up like any of the nearly 1,700 Oregon foster youth who are officially relegated to "permanent foster care." Like them, she might have gone from placement to placement for years before exiting the system alone at 18. Without a permanent connection to a family, she might have "aged out" of care facing the common risk factors for former foster youth: homelessness, poverty, illness. But at 15, she is focused on homecoming, her grades and making plans for her future. Without Jackie Lynn, Joey and Brodie, who struggled with behavioral issues and learning disabilities, might have been labeled "unadoptable" and left in permanent foster care. Instead, they are thriving, proudly showing off prizes from school on the refrigerator and the green bedroom "Mom," Jackie Lynn, painted for them.

Extended families like this one can be part of our solution to reducing Oregon's rate of long-term foster care-currently one of the highest in the nation.

Across the country, the greatest increase in adoptions from foster care has been from extended family members. States like Florida, California, and Missouri that are piloting robust, ongoing efforts to locate and engage relatives of children in foster care are seeing significant increases in adoption rates. Oregon should also invest in practice models like Family Finding, which is based on a core belief that every child can, and should, have a family.

The story of Jackie and her kids is not just the heartwarming story of one family-it shows us what's possible when private citizens, government agencies and community organizations come together to solve a pressing problem. Children First for Oregon is committed to fostering partnerships to expand the practices that we know make adoptions from foster care successful. For Jackie's family, adoption assistance from the state and affordable housing from the Bridge Meadows community made becoming a family of four overnight financially feasible. In addition, the comprehensive post-adoption counseling and services available through Bridge Meadows gave her the support to better understand the kids' behavior and help them transition from the trauma of being uprooted into stable family life. Oregon should give new families the best chance possible by providing these types of post-adoption and guardianship services.

The 1,700 Oregon children languishing in permanent foster care are longing for a family this holiday season as well. Foster care is a necessary crisis measure to protect children, but it should never be a place to grow up. This family's story and the growing number of stories like it in other states show us that finding a home for every child is doable-it's not easy, but the most important things rarely are. They have handed us the blueprint. Now we must build on it.

Pamela Butler is child welfare policy manager with Children First for Oregon. Derenda Schubert, Ph.D., is executive director at Bridge Meadows.

Make a Referral to AFFEC's Family Finding Program

Are you a caseworker who is interested in learning more about Family Finding? Do you work with children who need extra support, a familial placement, or ancestral connections?

You can refer a case to AFFEC's Family Finding program by completing this [online referral form](#) or by emailing the Permanency Director, Caitlin, at caitlin@afamilyforeverychild.org.

By referring a case to Family Finding you can ensure that you are

conducting diligent searches for the children and teens on your caseload.

**Help a child have a happier holiday season and become a Family Finding [sponsor](#) or [volunteer](#)!
Have an excellent holiday!**

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